Did you know that each of CAT’s Savannah Belles Ferries is named for four instrumental women in Chatham County’s history? In honor of Women’s History Month, CAT is celebrating these great women and many more! Learn about the Savannah Belles and other important women in Chatham County’s history by going to https://www.catchacat.org/media/womens-history-month-2022/ (You can also scan the QR code in the image above to go to the page.) On the webpage, you can learn about these important women by clicking on their image.

Savannah Belles Ferry service

The Savannah Belles Ferry system provides free passage across the Savannah River between downtown’s riverwalk and Hutchinson Island, home of the Savannah Convention Center and Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa. The accessible ferries, which can accommodate bicycles and luggage, operate from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week.

A cat rescue at CAT

We want to thank our employees and Jennifer Taylor and Chela Gutierrez from Renegade Paws Rescue, who worked together to save a female kitten from a storm-water drain at CAT’s bus lot on Friday. Gutierrez was able to lure the kitten into a food-line cage in order to get the frightened feline out of her predicament. The kitten appeared to be five months old. Once she is fixed, she will be going to the home of one of our CAT’s employees, who agreed to adopt her.

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CAT services returning to full seating capacity

Starting on Monday, March 14, Chatham Area Transit will begin allowing full seating capacity on its fixed-route buses, CAT Mobility paratransit vehicles and Savannah Belles Ferry boats.

CAT implemented half-capacity restrictions on all service vehicles at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for more space for passengers to spread out. The decision to restore vehicle capacity is based on the decreasing rate of COVID-19 infections and the increased availability of vaccines. Passenger on all of CAT’s service will still be required to wear masks, as required by the Transportation Security Administration. Standing on buses will still be prohibited when the increased capacity goes into effect.

Increasing capacity is in line with what other transit agencies have been doing throughout the country, said CAT CEO Faye DiMassimo.

“We’re balancing public safety with the needs of our riders,” DiMassimo said. “And this is consistent with how our peers in the industry have adapted at this stage of the pandemic.”

The increased capacity is expected to help address some of the service impacts from the pandemic and an operator shortage by allowing for more passengers to board CAT’s vehicles.

CAT increases starting pay rate for paratransit operators

Chatham Area Transit recently increased the base pay rate of existing and new CAT Mobility paratransit operators, to make CAT more competitive in today’s labor market. The pay rate for full-time and part-time paratransit operators has been increased from $12.45 to $14.25 per hour.

Paratransit operators for the CAT Mobility service provide reservation-based transportation for individuals who are unable to use CAT’s fixed-route bus service. The increased pay is expected to help attract new operators, retain existing ones and alleviate some of the service disruptions operator vacancies have caused.

The increased pay rates were implemented as CAT continues to be impacted by an operator shortage and the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of vacancies, call outs, and reduced capacity on vehicles has resulted in disruptions and delays.

In addition to the pay increase, the CAT Board recently approved a $1,000 hiring and retention bonus for all positions as a way to address the issue. CAT also recently partnered with the Coastal Regional Commission to provide supplemental paratransit service.

“We are determined to provide the best possible service to our customers, while also recognizing the hard work of our employees, amid the continuing challenges posed by the pandemic,” said CAT CEO Faye DiMassimo. “This pay increase is well deserved and just one way in which we plan to accomplish this goal.”

Send an email to marketing@catchacat.org to subscribe to our weekly electronic newsletter, the CAT Express.
CAT People: Rider Tammy Monkus

Chatham Area Transit operators who were greeted with bags of candy in the downtown transit center’s breakroom Friday have Tammy Monkus to thank for the early Valentine’s Day treats.

Monkus has been using CAT’s services for about five years and she delivered the goodie bags as a way to show her appreciation to the people who get her I need to go,” she said, “I appreciate everything CAT has done.”

The Valentine’s Day gift bags were not the first time Monkus has shown her appreciation for CAT’s employees and the services they provide. Last fall, she dropped off Halloween treats for CAT employees to enjoy. Her hobbies include needlepoint and she has also made operators coasters depicting their favorite football team.

“They call me the crafts lady,” she said. “I just keep myself busy.”

“If you happen to see ‘Mr. 14’, be sure to say hello and thank him for helping to provide a vital community service. I need to go, ” he said. Fletcher said he enjoys building relationships with CAT’s customers, as he transports employees, students and retirees to various destinations on a daily basis. He gets to know the regulars so well that he becomes concerned if they suddenly stop riding.

“They are like family now,” he said. A former bus driver for the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System for about 10 years, Fletcher said that some of the young students he used to drive to school back then now catch his CAT bus on their way to work. ”It’s like ‘wow I saw you as a child,’” he said. “It’s connecting the dots.” Fletcher is currently working “extra board”, which means he covers the bus routes where he is needed. Previously, he mainly drove the 14 Abercorn route, and he said many of his customers still know him as “Mr. 14.”

CAT People: Operator Trevon Fletcher

Trevon Fletcher started working for Chatham Area Transit as a fixed-route operator about three years ago, a career he said he saw as an opportunity to make a difference.

“You’re connected with the community,” he said. Fletcher said he enjoys building relationships with CAT’s customers, as he transports employees, students and retirees to various destinations on a daily basis. He gets to know the regulars so well that he becomes concerned if they suddenly stop riding.

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If you happen to see ‘Mr. 14’, be sure to say hello and thank him for helping to provide a vital community service.

CAT to debut electric bus during St. Patrick’s Day parade

Chatham Area Transit will be debuting one of its new electric buses as a participant in the St. Patrick’s Day parade on March 17.

“We are thrilled to be able to demonstrate our desire to help reduce our carbon footprint as Savannah comes together for this holiday occasion,” said CEO Faye DiMassimo. “This family event is a perfect opportunity to showcase our commitment to go green.”

The bus is one of six Gillig battery-powered buses CAT recently acquired to replace diesel buses that have reached the end of their useful life.

CAT anticipates the electric buses’ first day of pilot service will be on Earth Day, April 22. The pilot launch will follow the completion of an electric bus roll-out plan, which is intended to ensure the efficient deployment of the vehicles.

Charging stations were also recently installed at CAT’s bus lot on East Gwinnett Street, ahead of the electric bus’s arrival. In addition, CAT acquired a mobile charging station so that the electric buses can be charged in remote locations, which will be useful during hurricane evacuations and other emergencies.

By deploying battery electric buses in place of existing diesel vehicles, CAT expects to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, while also reducing lifetime vehicle costs.

CAT Board notes

During February’s regular meeting, the CAT Board renewed its membership with APTA, the nonprofit association that represents transit organizations around the world. In addition, the board approved a resolution to commit to fulfilling the core principles of APTA’s Racial Equity Commitment Pilot Program and continually improve CAT’s diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. The program requires participating agencies to adhere to a 2-year timetable of deliverables towards the advancement of racial equity at an organizational level. The board also approved an additional task order and amended contract with AECOM, which provides CAT grant assistance. The approved action will allow for the completion of the grant application review process for the construction of two new ferries.

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CAT’s March 2022 meeting calendar

All of the meetings will be held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual meetings can be viewed live on CAT’s YouTube page at: https://www.youtube.com/chathamareatransit.

CAT Board Committee Meetings

Date: March 8
System Development Planning: 10:30 a.m.
Service Delivery Operation: 1 p.m.
Financial Services Audit/Compliance: 2:30 p.m.
Executive Governance Committee
Date: March 15
Time: 11 a.m.

CAT Board Regular Meeting

Date: March 22
Time: 10 a.m.