

RTAP

BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SPRING—VOL.8, No.2

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CONFERENCE

14th Annual Florida RTAP Paratransit Rodeo Recap

The 14th Annual Florida RTAP Paratransit Rodeo has held on May 8th at the VOTRAN mobility center complex in South Daytona. The weather was wonderful, the lodgings at the Hilton Daytona Beach Resort on Daytona Beach were picturesque, and the hospitality of VOTRAN was magnificent!

With thirty-two of Florida's best paratransit operators competing for the title of Florida RTAP Paratransit Rodeo Champion, the 2010 Rodeo proved to be a spirited and lively event.

At the Rodeo Awards Banquet on Saturday evening, the following winners were announced and recognized:

Sure-Lok Above and Beyond Award: David Cole, St. Johns Council on Aging

Van Category: 1st place winner Michael Wimberly, Calhoun County Transit; 2nd place winner Gary Walker, Calhoun County COA; 3rd place winner Raymond Aylmer, Gulf County Transit

Small Bus Category: 1st place winner Ernest Rittman, Big Bend Transit; 2nd place winner Linda Attaway, Calhoun County Transit; 3rd place winner Micek Snopek, St. Johns County COA

As Florida Paratransit Rodeo champions, Michael and Ernest went on to compete at the National Paratransit Rodeo event sponsored by the Community Transportation Association of American (CTAA) in Long Beach California in late May. Congratulations to Michael Wimberly on placing 5th in the Van Category at the CTAA Rodeo!

Based on the success of this year's event, make sure to make plans to attend the 15th Annual Florida RTAP Paratransit Rodeo which will again be held in Daytona Beach.



Van Category: (L-R) Raymond Aylmer, Michael Wimberly, Gary Walker



Small Bus Category: (L-R) Micek Snopek, Ernest Rittman, Linda Attaway



Above and Beyond Award Winner: (L-R) Chris Yaber—Sure-Lok, Inc. Representative & David Cole—St. Johns COA



2010 Above and Beyond Award

The Florida Department of Transportation's Public Transit Office awarded its annual "Above and Beyond" Award to an exemplary paratransit driver at the 2010 Paratransit Roadeo in Daytona Beach, Florida. The award was presented to David Cole, paratransit driver from St. John's County Council on Aging (COA), Inc. in St. Augustine.

The purpose of the "Above and Beyond" award is to honor a driver who consistently performs in an outstanding manner and shows great care and concern for passengers with special needs.

Cole, employed with St. Johns County COA since 1996, is an exceptional employee who performs beyond the call of duty. As stated by the St. Johns County Council on Aging Director of Transportation Lisa Love, "David's dedication to his job, his commitment to safety and his compassion for

the people he transports is evident to all who witness his job performance."

David's commitment to safety is evidenced by his impeccable safety record, which includes fourteen years as a full-time driver in which he has never had an incident involving an improperly secured mobility aide.

David has been described as "a kind, caring professional who personally knows his passengers and relates to them as individuals. A ride on David's bus is more than a trip to a destination, it is time spent with a friend."

Congratulations to St. John's County Council on Aging's David Cole for displaying exemplary customer service and for going "Above and Beyond" the call of duty!

Florida DOT Public Transit Office Receives National CTAA Award

The Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) Transit Office was recognized by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) during the 2010 CTAA EXPO in Long Beach, California. At the CTAA Annual Awards Breakfast on May 26th, the Florida DOT Public Transit Office was announced as the winner of the 2010 CTAA State Leadership Award.

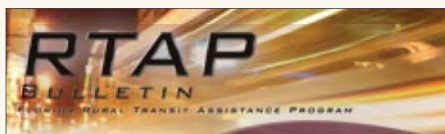
This CTAA annual award recognizes an entire state association or state agency that is effective in:

- Providing creative, effective and continuing training and technical assistance programs;
- Using new concepts, strategies, procedures and policies to provide support to local transit systems;
- Communicating local transit systems' concerns and issues at the state and national level; and,

- Advocating for public and community transportation at the state and local level.

This award formally acknowledges something that all transit professionals in Florida already knew – that the Florida Department of Transportation Transit Office is a true partner in Florida public transportation community and provides active leadership to promote and enhance public transportation services throughout Florida.

Congratulations to our friends and partners at the Florida DOT Transit Office!



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RTAP BULLETIN

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OUR MISSION

The Florida RTAP provides training, continuing education, and technical assistance to those who provide or assist in the provision of public transportation services in rural and small urban communities in order to promote the coordinated delivery of safe, efficient, and effective transit services.

Editor: Yolanda Moore Designer: Stephanie Zavacki

SPOTLIGHT—Bill Mayer, VOTRAN Operations Manager

SPOTLIGHT highlights one of our many energetic Florida RTAP transit professionals and allows these individuals to introduce themselves in their own words. In this issue the SPOTLIGHT is on Bill Mayer, VOTRAN, Operations Manager.



Name: Bill Mayer

Title: VOTRAN Operations Manager

VOTRAN History:

I began my employment at VOTRAN in January 1991 as a Fixed Route Bus Operator. In January 1994, I was given the opportunity to become an Operations

Supervisor. In July 1995, I became the Paratransit Operations Manager. This was one year after we took over as Community Transportation Coordinator on behalf of Volusia County and began performing all of the public transportation management in Volusia County. In November 1998, VOTRAN reorganized and I was made the Operations Manager responsible for both Fixed Route and Paratransit operations. With the help of a lot of good people, we have been able to meet our obligation to the residents of Volusia County.

Birthplace: Navy brat born in Pensacola, Florida and raised in Tiverton, Rhode Island – a small farm town on Naragansit Bay.

Education: I joined the Army at 17 and received my G.E.D. Since joining VOTRAN, I have attended numerous training classes, some college courses and learned through hours and hours of hands on training. I was asked by RTAP many years ago to help develop the Paratransit operator training program. This was very informative and educational. It helped to define the path I am on.

Professional History: After the Army, I drove trucks for various companies and worked heavy equipment. I began working as a lineman for a cable construction company and progressed through that to running smaller contracts until my foot was crushed in a work accident. This is when I moved to Florida and was able to convince the then Operations Manager to give me a try and he hired me (George

Soloway one of my many mentors). It was Yvonne Caraway, Assistant General Manager that selected me for Supervisor and then as the Paratransit Manager, (she is another one of my mentors).

Years Working with Current Agency: 19 years

Years Working in Transit Industry: 19 years

Biggest Surprise in Paratransit: How many people actually need our help just to do the day to day things we take for granted. Understand, my previous life was all physical and I was never really in a position that involved me with the ADA community.

Biggest Challenge in Paratransit: When some people (very few) feel they are entitled to more than anyone else and don't care what the cost is and treat Paratransit services as their private taxi.

Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit: Helping people get to work and all the other places that continue to keep them self-sufficient and provide for their families.

Community Involvement: I spend all of my time with work and family. I support VOTRAN's United Way efforts, work as a member of FDOT's Florida Operations Network (FON), work closely with CUTR and RTAP, and I support numerous efforts such as Operation Shoebox that supports our hardworking military members.

Personal Background: I have a wife, two daughters, two sons, but no pets. I work in my yard and house and I'm always doing something like reading and watching movies.

Childhood Ambition: I truly don't know if I ever had one. All I ever felt was important was to be happy in all things.

Inspiration: I am a strong believer in the constitution of the United States. Our forefathers knew what should be done and how to make it happen.

Favorite Book: There are too many books that I have read two and three times. I read anything that grabs my attention from fantasy and science fiction to history.

Florida Heartland Rural Mobility Plan: A Regional Look at Florida's Rural Mobility Needs

In 2003, the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida began a planning effort to identify and address the mobility challenges within a rural area in south central Florida designated as a "Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern." This initial study was completed in August 2005 and included 17 recommendations within five core service areas including: low income/employee needs; mobility options for seniors; mobility planning; marketing services; and land use and development.

Through a newly developed partnership with Enterprise Florida, Inc. and the Florida Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative, Inc. (FHREDI), a summit was held on December 7, 2005. The summit included FHREDI board members; local government officials; members of the economic development community, including major employers and developers; advocacy groups; and state agency representatives. FHREDI and the FDOT agreed to the mutual implementation of the recommendations contained in the original plan, including the development of a Heartland Rural Mobility Plan by CUTR and Tindale-Oliver and Associates, Inc.

The Heartland Rural Mobility Plan effort was designed to be a comprehensive multi-jurisdictional planning effort that:

- Included an extensive public participation plan;
- Outlined a strategic approach to meeting the mobility needs of the area, including employment transportation;
- Provided a sound business foundation for the resulting mobility program;
- Included a finance and implementation plan;
- Met the mobility needs of the Heartland area, especially within the economic development and land use framework; and
- Recommended a governing structure that could include a regional mobility entity.

Issue of Significance:

The Heartland Rural Mobility Plan (HRMP) was designed to identify and address the mobility challenges within a six-county rural area in south central Florida designated as a "Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern." The HRMP study area included the six counties and four communities

included in the region. These jurisdictions include Desoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties and the communities of Belle Glade, Pahokee, and South Bay in Palm Beach County and Immokalee in Collier County. The study area encompasses more than 5,000 square miles and includes approximately 300,000 people.

Strategy, Goals and Objectives

The HRMP was a comprehensive multi-jurisdictional planning effort designed to meet the requirements for the development of a Transit Development Plan established in Section 347, Florida Statutes, which is normally an urban transportation work effort.

At the onset of the effort, goals and objectives were developed to serve as the guide for the development and evaluation of mobility options for the region. The identification of these goals and objectives for the Heartland Region was a fundamental step in the development of the plan. The HRMP goals and supporting objectives were developed around five major themes:

- Promoting mobility within the Heartland Region.
- Supporting the Heartland Region's economic development opportunities.
- Providing coordination between the Heartland Region's land use development and the promotion of smart growth.
- Promoting mobility from the Heartland Region to regional destinations (to include major urbanized areas).
- Coordinating regional mobility governance, planning, and funding.

Public Participation Plan

The HRMP effort employed an extensive public involvement program to inform the public and local decision-makers about the plan development process, as well as to foster consensus throughout the large Heartland study area. The public participation plan included several public involvement techniques to ensure the active participation of citizens in the community, including direct

Regional Mobility Working Group



involvement (engaging the public with “hands-on” workshops or other discussion venues).

Direct involvement techniques included agency coordination meetings, Heartland Rural Mobility Plan steering committee meetings, a presentation kit and materials, public workshops, discussion groups, public hearings, presentations and coordination with elected and policy boards, and surveys, comment cards, and citizen feedback.

Information distribution (distributing materials that are used to inform the general public of issues regarding the project) was also used and included newsletters, e-mail updates, and a project web site.

Findings:

The uniqueness of this study was the focus on public transportation coordinated with economic development in an economically-depressed rural region. As the study progressed, it became apparent that no single mobility operation or institutional arrangement would effectively address the mobility needs of the area. The diversity and geographic layout of the Heartland region presented a wide variety of transportation and mobility needs. This resulted in a plan that identifies a series of potential mobility alternatives that could be pursued to address these needs, including:

- Exploring the feasibility of the application of a limited number of major travel corridor fixed routes, route deviation concepts to maximize geographical coverage, or circulator transit services to serve local city and activity areas.
- Using and building upon the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged structure administered by Community Transportation Coordinators serving each of the counties in the Heartland region.

- Promoting the FDOT Commuter Assistance Program that encourages the formation of carpools and vanpools and other transportation demand strategies.
- Seeking ways to encourage the return or replacement of inter-city transportation services, such as Greyhound or Amtrak, which have been reduced or withdrawn from the Heartland region in recent years.
- Encouraging the development and coordination of volunteer mobility services.
- Expanding and coordinating inter-county and regional mobility alternatives to address transportation disadvantaged, medical, veterans’ services, and other essential transportation needs to provide access to required services.
- Pursuing additional “mobile service delivery” options to eliminate or minimize the need for transportation.
- Developing programs that support community taxi services through subsidized travel vouchers and other innovative programs.
- Establishing a regional mobility coordinator structure/organization.

Conclusions:

The Heartland Rural Mobility Plan has been endorsed by all six County Commissions and the FHREDI Board of Directors and has now transitioned to its next phase, which will:

- Identify a regional “Mobility Working Group” to formulate implementation strategies
- Pursue additional federal, state, and local funding
- Establish a coordinated, regional process
- Identify and implement pilot projects
- Continue to identify and evaluate options for meeting the mobility needs of the regions residents and visitors.

The formation and launching of the Mobility Working Group is critical to maintaining the momentum for addressing the mobility needs of the region and taking the recommendations detailed in the Heartland Rural Mobility Plan from concept to reality.

Women and Rural Transit

Prior to enrolling in the UNC-Chapel Hill Department of City and Regional Planning, I worked for two years at the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (Winston-Salem, N.C.). Apart from my primary responsibilities related to semi-annual grant making, I also had the opportunity to assist with the Women's Economic Equity Project (WEE Project), an initiative to increase economic self-sufficiency for rural women. In my role as site liaison for the Foundation's nonprofit partner in Vance County, I witnessed the struggles of rural women trying to access education and jobs via an inadequate transportation network. I also observed community partners' creative solutions for providing services in a time of rapidly increasing fuel prices. More than any other experience at the Foundation, the WEE Project highlighted the importance of regional transportation networks in facilitating economic opportunity not just for urban residents, but for rural populations as well.

Rural women face unique challenges compared to their urban counterparts. The exodus of manufacturing jobs has led to a shortage of well-paid, centralized employment in rural communities. As high-tech industries relocate to the urban fringe, rural residents regain access to employment but now struggle to obtain the higher education necessary to be trained for such jobs. This regionalization of employment and education is particularly challenging for low-income women. Faced with fewer safe, low-cost child care options, rural women often must choose between taking low-wage jobs closer to home and investing in costly private transportation for greater flexibility.

Franklin-Vance-Warren (FVW) Opportunity, Inc. is one organization working to address these imbalances between rural employment, education, and existing transportation systems. FVW Opportunity, Inc. became the Foundation's WEE Project partner in 2004 and continues to identify creative solutions to address the impasse between the high cost of private transportation and the minimal availability of regional public transportation. When fuel prices rose substantially in summer 2007, FVW Opportunity, Inc. called upon its partner, Vance-Granville Community College, to offer classes in the nonprofit's building so that participants would not have to withdraw because of unaffordable commuting costs. FVW Opportunity, Inc. also provides transportation/gas vouchers and may expand the program through a partnership with the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center. While the monetary value of the assistance may be small, FVW Opportunity, Inc. insists that dedicated transportation funds are critical to keeping rural women in school, employed, and away from the difficult decision faced



A park-and-ride lot in rural Chatham County, NC provides easy accessibility to free public transportation serving the Town of Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

by many low-income families to choose between gas and food, medication, or other essentials.

One take-away of the WEE Project in Vance County is the resolve of nonprofits and community organizations to find creative solutions to persistent problems. Nonetheless, these women face systemic barriers that cannot be sustainably overcome with classroom relocation or gas vouchers. The planning community must continue to encourage local and state governments to provide regional public transportation services in rural communities. In an era of shrinking state revenue, immediate changes are unlikely; however, the economic vitality of rural areas in North Carolina will continue to rest on residents' ability to access employment and education through means other than high-cost private transportation.

By: Brika Eklund, Graduate Student, Department of City and Regional Planning The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Editor's Note: This is a reprint of an article forwarded by the Southeastern Transportation Center, a consortium of nine universities from five states in DOT Region IV, is chartered under the theme Comprehensive Transportation Safety. The University of Tennessee, Georgia Tech, North Carolina A&T, North Carolina-Chapel Hill, North Carolina State, the University of Florida, the University of Kentucky, the University of South Florida and Vanderbilt comprise the STC.

2010 UPCOMING EVENTS

The classes and conferences listed below are sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation and the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa. If you would like to attend any of the courses, you will find a course announcement and registration form for each course at www.floridartap.org in the Training Calendar section. Click on course name to download or view training class details. If you have an idea for a training course or would like to host a course, please contact Amber Reep (813) 974-9823.

July 13-14, 2010

18th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Training and Technology Conference—Renaissance Orlando Hotel at SeaWorld, Orlando, FL

July 13, 2010 (12:30 to 1:00 pm)

RTAP Advisory Committee Luncheon Annual Meeting—Renaissance Orlando Hotel at SeaWorld, Orlando, FL

September 14-15, 2010

Non-Emergency Stretcher Training Workshop—Marianna, FL

September 22, 2010

TSI Reasonable Suspicion Determination for Supervisors—Tampa, FL

September 22-23, 2010

The Runcutter Course™—Pompano Beach, FL

October 17-19, 2010

36th Florida Public Transportation Association Annual Conference—Miami Hilton, Miami, FL

18th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Training and Technology Conference

The Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged will be hosting its 18th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Training and Technology Conference at the Renaissance Orlando Hotel at SeaWorld from July 13-14, 2010.

As in past years, this event will feature over 35 vendors showcasing their products and services. Participants will be provided the opportunity to attend and participate in a wide variety of breakout and plenary sessions. Among the topics available to attendees include: mobility management, Medicaid fair hearings, distracted driver training, operational policy development, sensitivity in customer relations and dealing with difficult people, wheelchair securement, how to prepare for your quality assurance/audit, computer/internet security, a planners net-

work session, transit's future presentation, an update on Florida's transportation plan, and much more.

The Awards Banquet on the final evening of the conference will recognize the best of the best of the Florida TD industry – both agencies and individuals.

For more information and to register for TDC's 18th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Training and Technology Conference click on this link conferences.dce.ufl.edu/td/ or call (352) 392-1701 Monday thru Friday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm EST.

A copy of the Participant Conference Brochure can be found at www.dot.state.fl.us/ctd/

We look forward to seeing you in Orlando in July.

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