RTAP BULLETIN

10 YEARS

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SPRING—VOL.10, NO.2

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16th Annual Florida RTAP Paratransit Roadeo

The 16th Annual Florida RTAP Paratransit Roadeo was held on April 28th in Ocala at the SunTran facility, and was co-hosted by SunTran and Marion Senior Services.

Florida's best paratransit operators competed for the title of Florida RTAP Paratransit Roadeo Champion. In addition to the on-course completion, participants attended training classes and took a written skills and knowledge test. Several volunteer judges were also on hand to provide their expertise during the competition.

Steven Neal, General Manager with SunTran, and his staff provided top-notch hospitality for all of the Roadeo participants throughout the event.

At the Saturday evening Roadeo Awards Banquet, the following winners and champions were announced and recognized:

Sure-Lok Above and Beyond Award: Dorothy (Dottie) Higgins, VOTRAN, South Daytona

Van Category: 1st place winner Michael Wimberly, Calhoun County Senior Citizens; 2nd place winner Raymond Aylmer, Gulf County Transportation; 3rd place winner Peggy Shiver, Liberty County Transit

Small Bus Category: 1st place winner Gary Walker, Calhoun County Senior Citizens; 2nd place winner Mary Kamasinski, Manatee County BOCC; 3rd place winner Paul Leavens, Polk County Transit

For more highlights, and to view more pictures of the 2012 Florida RTAP Paratransit Roadeo, please go to the Paratransit Roadeo link at: *www.floridartap.org/pages/events.html*

Above & Left: Operators compete in Roadeo events

Florida Champions Shine at Nationals!

As Florida Paratransit Roadeo Champions, Calhoun County paratransit operators Michael Wimberly and Gary Walker competed at the National Paratransit Roadeo, sponsored by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) in Baltimore, Maryland on May 20, 2012.

Kudos to Michael for placing 2nd in the van category and Gary for placing 14th in the cutaway category and representing the State of Florida so well!

STATE OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

CUTR

USF UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Florida RTAP Paratransit Roadeo Winners

Small Bus Category

L-R: All pictured with Bob Westbrook
1st Place: Gary Walker
2nd Place: Mary Kamasinski
3rd Place: Paul Leavens

Van Category

L-R: All pictured with Bob Westbrook
1st Place: Michael Wimberly
2nd Place: Raymond Aylmer
3rd Place: Peggy Shiver

Above and Beyond Award Winner

The Florida Department of Transportation Public Transit Office awarded its annual "Above and Beyond" award to an exemplary paratransit driver at the 2012 Paratransit Roadeo in Ocala, Florida. 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.

This year's award recipient was Dorothy (Dottie) Higgins a paratransit driver from VOTRAN, in South Daytona, Florida.

Dottie Higgins, who has been employed with VOTRAN since 1995, is an exceptional employee who consistently performs beyond the call of duty. During her time at VOTRAN, she has become a well-liked, respected and indispensable member of the VOTRAN team. Mrs. Higgins strives to provide safe, quality service to her customers, and their welfare is of the utmost concern to her.

Recently she went to pick up one of her customers and the customer's husband came to the door and said his wife was not responding to him. Mrs. Higgins assessed the situation, radioed dispatch to call for help, performed CPR and stayed until medical help arrived; all the while maintaining her professional demeanor and providing a calm presence for the husband.

Congratulations to VOTRAN's Dorothy Higgins for displaying exemplary customer service and for going "Above and Beyond" the call of duty!

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Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program

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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—Gene Keen, Bay Town Trolley Operations Manager

Each SPOTLIGHT edition 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 Gene Keen, Bay Town Trolley Operations Manager.

Name: Gene Keen

Title: Bay Town Trolley Operations Manager

Birthplace: Panama City, Florida

Education: Mosley High School; some Gulf Coast State College; H & R Block Tax School; and transportation training classes with CUTR/USF

Professional History: I've worked in banking, restaurants, tax accounting, income tax preparer, office manager, school bus operator, and as a transit operator and manager

Years Working with Current Agency: 3 years

Years working in Transit Industry: 5 years

Biggest Challenge in Transit: Helping the most possible with the available resources.

Personal Benefit of Working in Transit: Helping to provide a much needed service.

Community Involvement: Pastor of New Beginning Church in Southport, Florida for 15+ years; worked with youth through church association for 10+ years

Personal Background: Married to Gina Keen for 21+ years; one daughter, Genna, 19 years old; family dog—Gracie; I like to read, play cards and watch movies

Childhood Ambition: To be a teacher

Inspiration: The Bible, my family and friends

Favorite Book: The Bible, murder mysteries and some science fiction

Favorite Color: Red

Favorite Candy: Miniature Reese's cups

My Motto: "Assume the best; make them tell you the rest"

Save the Date
October 28-30, 2012

Registration will open in July. For more information visit *www.floridatransit.org*

Public Transit Professionals Converge on Tampa

Over 200 transit professionals gathered at the USF Embassy Suites on June 5-6, 2012 for the 2012 FDOT/FPTA/CUTR Professional Development Workshop. The Workshop was co-sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA), and the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR).

The Workshop goal was to offer professional development and educational enrichment opportunities to Florida's public transit professionals. The one-stop workshop offered public transit professionals an excellent opportunity to learn from industry experts, attend professional development training, learn about research updates, and network with their peers. Workshop attendees participated in educational training classes and general session discussions that stimulated new ideas and identified creative solutions to problem solving and strategic planning.

The Workshop sessions focused on a wide variety of topics such as transit security, managing transit emergencies, grant writing skills, substance abuse management, sustainability design and LEED certification, federal grant programs, maintenance, customer service, marketing, procurement, transit planning, communication skills, disability etiquette, several professional development sessions, and many train-the-trainer facilitated sessions. Additionally, the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged hosted two training sessions on regional transit mobility management projects and Medicaid reform.

Florida's Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) sponsored two sessions. The first was the National RTAP training module entitled "Customer Driven Service" that was presented by Mike Noel (below). The other was the debut of the Computer Based Training (CBT) module "Disability Etiquette for Bus Operators." This CBT was developed by CUTR and funded by FDOT through Florida RTAP.

Sunshine Line & HART Collaborate to Provide More Service

Think government can be more efficient? Hillsborough Area Regional Transit (HART) and the Sunshine Line, the two public transportation providers in Hillsborough County, agree with you. The recent review of the services they provide to citizens with disabilities showed that both Sunshine Line and HART run vans to nine dialysis centers in the Tampa area.

In a new six-month pilot project, these customers will be transitioned into the services provided by HART Plus, allowing Sunshine Line, the Community Transportation Coordinator, to provide much needed transportation services to other Hillsborough County residents.

Congratulations to HART and Hillsborough County's Sunshine Line on their research and collaboration! Please send us your local stories on collaboration and operating efficiencies!

Contact Ed Wisniewski, Sunshine Line Manager at *wisniewskie@hillsboroughcounty.org* or (813) 276-8999.

Guest Editorial: Thoughts on Coordination

By: Cathy Brown, Executive Director, St. Johns County Council on Aging, St. Augustine (St. Johns County), Florida

Coordination is hard-wired into community transportation in Florida. Since its inception in the late 1970s with legislation creating the transportation disadvantaged program, the providers of these essential services knew they had to coordinate to survive. Resources were slim and the job was challenging.

Additionally, the idea of a coordinated system is the legacy of United We Ride Ambassador Jo Ann Hutchison. Her long tenure as Executive Director of the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged secured the idea of coordination in the collective culture. Her continuity of leadership, coupled with the economic benefits achieved by coordination, solidified coordination as the desired way to provide transit services.

Human services transportation is a dynamic, rather than static, process. Even with a strong foundation in coordination, providers must continually monitor, adjust, and respond to the world in which they work. Our agency, St. Johns County Council on Aging (SJCCOA), is a case in point.

SJCCOA began providing transportation services for the transportation disadvantaged in 1982. At that time, the population of this rural north Florida county was but 50,000 people in a 600 square mile area. By the 2000 Census, the population had soared to 125,000 and continues to grow at a rapid pace.

The challenges of this growth overwhelmed the agency and in 1999 the board of directors hired a new leadership team. The charge to the new team was to re-engineer the agency to meet the growing needs. Simple cost containment was not the answer. A new culture had to be created.

The leadership team consisted of the executive director, the operations director, and the finance director. We discarded an unwieldy hierarchical "chain of command" and instituted what we called a culture of leadership. Every member of the staff is a leader—a leader of their assigned responsibility. The dispatcher leads dispatching, the drivers lead their buses, and so on and so on. Everyone has a stake in the mission: to take folks where they need to go and treat them with dignity and respect.

The leadership culture also required a new way of thinking. Instead of reliance on rules and regulations (though they are not ignored!), we developed principles to guide us:

The half of knowledge is knowing where to find it—so if you don't understand something, ask!

People cannot be committed to goals they don't help set—so we get buy-in from the affected employees by talking about concerns in advance and enlisting their ideas and solutions.

There's no right way to do the wrong thing—so we make sure everyone knows what is required and then they do it! The right way to tie down a wheelchair; the right way to fill out the paperwork; the right way to wash the bus; and so on and so on.

This is not a hostage situation—if you choose to work at SJCCOA then you need to be happy about it. The people we transport are often dealing with daunting problems and our job is to make their lives easier, not harder. Besides that, life is way too short to do a job you're not happy to do.

All people behave in ways that make sense to them—so you might find yourself engaging all manners of people and behavior. Again, you have the choice: choose to be either amused or amazed!

Every beginning has a barrier built in to it. Don't entertain your barriers! By that we mean get creative. It's much more fun to think of solutions than to sit around and complain. Coming up with creative ways to overcome perceived barriers is a true delight!

The management team is committed to the leadership culture, which continues to the present day. Another principle: what you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you say—is essential to the level of trust within the organization. Responding to the growth surge of the community might have been impossible with the former way of thinking.

We think our approach is one of the fruits of a coordinated system. Coordination requires respect among the stakeholders. It asks participants to be on the alert to close gaps in services. Providers look for doing the next right thing for their riders. We continually ask: "What would it take to . . . " which leads us towards solutions, evaluating priorities, and making congruent decisions.

2012 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 the 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 16-20, 2012
TSI's Transit Industrial Safety Management—Tampa, FL

July 18, 2012
Substance Abuse Management and Program Compliance Regional Training—Ft. Myers, FL

July 30-31, 2012
The Runcutter Course—Broward County, FL

July 31-August 1, 2012
20th Annual CTD Conference—Renaissance Orlando Hotel at SeaWorld, Orlando, FL

August 23, 2012
Substance Abuse Management and Program Compliance Regional Training—Wildwood, FL

September 12, 2012
NTI's Crisis Communication Training for Transit Employees—Tampa, FL

September 13, 2012
NTI's National Incident Management Command System: An Introduction for Public Transit Personnel—Tampa, FL

October 28-30, 2012
Florida Public Transportation Association Annual Conference and EXPO—Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort, Daytona Beach, FL

20th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Best Practices and Training Workshop

The Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) will be hosting its 20th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Best Practices and Training Workshop at the Renaissance at Sea World in Orlando from July 30–August 1, 2012.

As in past years, this event will feature 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. The Awards Banquet on the final evening of the conference will recognize the best of the best in the Florida TD industry–both agencies and individuals.

For more information and to register for CTD's 20th Annual Transportation Disadvantaged Best Practices and Training Workshop click on this link *http://conferences.dce.ufl.edu/td/.*

If you have any questions, contact Sheri Powers at *sheri.powers@dot.state.fl.us* or John Irvine at *john.irvine@dot.state.fl.us* or by telephone at (800) 983-2435 or (850) 410-5700.

We look forward to seeing you in Orlando!

Florida Commission for the
CTD
Transportation Disadvantaged