

# WACF financial support helps keep Watertown Area Transit on the road

By Roger Whittle  
Public Opinion Editor

Directing a rapidly growing city transit service is always a challenge, but Terry Hoffman has a secret weapon.

Hoffman runs Watertown Area Transit. The organization is funded mainly through the federal government, but transits must come up with a 20 percent local match (not counting fare income) for any federal dollars received. And with a yearly budget north of \$700,000, those local matching dollars can be significant.

Fortunately, Hoffman has the Watertown Area Community Foundation solidly in his corner.

"They are one of the most important parts of our operation, simply because of what they do for us," Hoffman told the *Public Opinion* earlier this week. "We've received money from them for vehicles. We've been awarded grants through their Youth Council and through their Giving Back 365 program. We couldn't do what we do without them."

Watertown Area Transit has been growing steadily in recent



Public Opinion photo

Debbie Stuchl and Terry Hoffman of Watertown Area Transit, and Julianne Endres of the Watertown Community Foundation show off the new graphics on a WAT van commemorating the 40th anniversary of the foundation.

years. As recently as 2011, WAT carried about 150 to 180 passengers a day. Now it's common for well over 400 people to ride WAT vehicles in a single day.

The Community Foundation's latest grant of \$8,000 will help WAT acquire a third ADA-accessible van.

"The number of medical trips we perform continues to rise," Hoffman said. "We have two Medi-vans now, and could probably use two more. We make a lot of medical trips to Sioux Falls, so having those vans is a big deal."

That grant pushed the foundation's all-time



Public Opinion file photo

Watertown Area Transit Director Terry Hoffman shows one of the security cameras on a WAT van, purchased with help from the Watertown Area Community Foundation.

support for Watertown Area Transit well over the \$50,000 level. Community Foundation grants have helped pay for security cameras on buses, radio equipment and helped provide rides for those who can't afford them, among other things.

"We recently received a \$2,000 Giving Back 365 grant to help get some LATI students to school," Hoffman said. "There are some students who really struggle with transportation for various reasons. Now, they can get to their classes and get their education."

The Community Foundation is far from the transit's only source of funding. WAT also receives money from the City of Watertown, Codington County and the United Way.

"Prairie Lakes Healthcare is also very good to us," Hoffman said.

When Hoffman talks to the directors of other transit organizations in the state, the topic of those local matching dollars often-times comes up.

When I tell them what organizations like Prairie Lakes and the Watertown Area Community Foundation do for us, they always say, 'Wow, that's great' Not everybody has that kind of local support."

The Community Foundation recently adorned one of the WAT's vans with a large decal commemorating the 40th anniversary of the WACF.

"The WACF board and its donors recognize the importance of the services Transit provides for our community," said Jan DeBerg, executive director of the Community Foundation. "We are fortunate to have them as a partner."