

The Update

September 2025

Serving the Counties of Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Montgomery, Mills, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby



SWIPCO Celebrates 50 Years, Johansen Named Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award Winner

ATLANTIC- Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO) hosted members, staff, and supporters for their 50th Anniversary Celebration and Annual Meeting on Thursday, September 25th at the Cass County Community Center in Atlantic. The gathering included dinner, annual report presentation, partnership awards, and the Inaugural Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award presentation.



L-R: Joanne Kohn, Widow of Ron Kohn; Eric Johansen, Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award Winner; John McCurdy, SWIPCO Executive Director.

SWIPCO celebrated 50 years of impact on Southwest Iowa, moving from an initial budget of \$45,000 and 2 employees in 1975 to a budget of \$8 million dollars and 108 employees in fiscal year 2025. Some highlights include \$300 million in total grants to the region, over 262 plans written for communities and counties, \$90 million in grant funds for water and wastewater projects, 1,706 homes rehabilitated, over 384 homeowners assisted with down-payment funds, and 9,235,700 rides provided by Southwest Iowa Transit Agency. The return on investment for SWIPCO member communities has been over \$150 for every dollar invested in the agency.

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Eight individuals were nominated for the Inaugural Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award.Continued



Crowd at the 50th Anniversary Celebration

SWIPCO Anniversary and Annual Meeting Continued...

The award was created to honor the legacy of the late Ron Kohn who was a Glenwood educator, Mayor, and Mills County Supervisor. Ron showed tremendous selfless leadership throughout his life, and the award shines a light on those that go above and beyond to serve the region, often without fanfare. The nominee class was Ryan Campbell, Mayor of Hastings; Carol Vinton, Former Mills County Supervisor; Kattie Lewis, SWITCH Tech Career Hub Director; Grace Garrett, Mayor of Atlantic; Steve Herrington, SWITA Driver; Kevin Cabbage, FMTC CEO; Angela Winther, Logan City Clerk; and Eric Johansen, Police Chief of Glenwood.

Each nominee was recognized for their work and ultimately Chief Eric Johansen was named the winner of the Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award for 2025. Chief Johansen has served the Glenwood Police force as an Officer and Chief for over 30 years and has created many community-centric events and programs to bring residents together. He started a Cultivate Community event that is very popular, recently launched a junior cadet program, driver safety courses for youth, and serves on the Mills County Chamber Foundation Board. Chief Johansen was nominated by former Mills County Chamber Director and current Realtor Jennie Davis. Davis introduced Chief Johansen and Ron's widow Joanne Kohn was there to present the award and congratulate all the nominees.



Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award Nominees (L-R): Kevin Cabbage, Steve Herrington, Grace Garrett, Carol Vinton, Angela Winther, Joanne Kohn (Ron's Widow), Eric Johansen (Winner), Ryan Campbell, Kattie Lewis, John McCurdy (SWIPCO Executive Director).

Eight partnership awards were presented in recognition of individuals, organizations, and businesses that help SWIPCO achieve their goals of serving the residents of Southwest Iowa.

Iowa DOT Office of Public Transit for their continued support of SWITA's operations and working to make public transit the best it can be in the State of Iowa.

SWIPCO 50th Anniversary Continued...

Nishna Valley Family YMCA for their many project partnerships with SWIPCO for facilities and youth transportation for preschool and other care programs.

Snyder & Associates, Inc. for their collaboration on over 100 projects with SWIPCO over the years. Helping make ideas come to life with plans for execution.

Atlantic Media- KJAN Radio, Atlantic News-Telegraph, and KSOM/KS 95.7 Radio for their continued support of informing the region of SWIPCO and SWITA's projects and services. We are blessed to be so well represented by willing information providers.

Sherry Kuntz, Senator Charles Grassley's Office for being a tireless advocate for our needs in Washington, D.C. Sherry is always very informed on our issue topics and is a strong advocate for the services SWIPCO and SWITA provides.

Iowa West Foundation for their continued funding support of many projects throughout the region. SWIPCO works often with projects that involve Iowa West Foundation funds and has been blessed to receive grants in the past three years for housing rehabilitation from Iowa West.

Danelle Bruce, Disability Access Point for partnership and advocacy for SWITA transportation to assist those with mental health service needs. She has long supported our work and helped coordinate services where needed to help the people of Southwest Iowa.

Tru Pro Construction for contract work helping make SWIPCO's Lead Hazard Reduction grant work a success. They have been a major player in completing lead remediation in our lead projects over the past two years.

Also, during the meeting four SWIPCO employees were recognized for milestone work anniversaries. Awards were presented to Mike Ballinger, Safety Coordinator, for 5 years of service; Phil Richter, Building Inspector I, for 5 years of service; and Nicole Rhodes, Grants Specialist II, for 5 years of service. SWITA Driver of the Year Mike Ames was also recognized.

SWIPCO is proud of the accomplishments of the past 50 years and looks forward to helping the region continue to thrive moving forward. SWIPCO, founded in 1975, is a council of governments serving eight counties in Southwest Iowa with public transportation, community development, and housing assistance. Counties served are Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby.

SWIPCO is an equal opportunity employer, provider, and lender.

SWITA Driver Smelser Honored at Midwest Transit Conference

KANSAS CITY- Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) Driver Max Smelser was recognized as an Operator Champion during the 2025 Midwest Transit Conference in Kansas City. Smelser has been a stalwart of the SWITA operator team for over 16 years. He is the Lead Driver for Pottawattamie County and is integral in keeping the Council Bluffs bus barn facility running smoothly.

The Midwest Transit Conference brings together transit professionals from across the states of Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska every two years for training, networking, and recognition. The Operator Champion Awards are crafted to recognize operators across the Midwest region that provide exceptional service to their riders and agencies. The awards were handed out during the Breakfast of Transit Champions on Friday, September 5, 2025, at the Kansas City Downtown Marriott.

SWITA Transportation Director Mark Lander said, “Max is a true one-of-a-kind driver and team member. He does so much to keep operations running smoothly from the Council Bluffs facility and is always willing to help other drivers. We are very fortunate to have Max on the team, and he is very deserving of this recognition.”

Mike Ames, SWITA Driver of the Year, was also recognized during a slideshow at the event for his contributions this past year along with other top drivers from the region. SWITA transportation is accessible to everyone in the eight-county region, including the disabled and elderly. SWITA offers several transportation options including work routes, medical trips, student transportation, taxi service in six communities, and special trips. SWITA vehicles are equipped with wheelchair accessibility and one personal attendant rides free.



Smelser accepting his Operator Champion Award



(L-R): Mark Lander, SWITA Transit Director; Max Smelser, SWITA Driver; Autumn Smelser, Max's Wife; Kristen Templeton, SWITA Transit Coordinator

Birthdays & Anniversaries



Teresa Wright

Finance Specialist
19 Years of Service



Tammy DeBord

Grants Specialist III
Birthday Month



Mark Hansen

Fleet Mechanic
17 Years of Service



Ann Anstey

Housing Programs Coordinator
8 Years of Service



Julie Hays

Transit Scheduler I
2 Years of Service



SWITA by the Numbers

August 2024		YTD (Since July 1)	
Total Miles	160,746	329,709	
Total Hours	8,827	17,901	
Total Rides	39,086	79,968	
August Rides by Service		August Rides by Demographic	
Workforce Rides	7,569	Disabled	22,277
Taxi Rides	4,875	Elderly	2,365
Student Rides	1,203	Other Gen. Public	14,444
Other	25,439		

Upcoming Grant Information:

- IDALS Urban Conservation Projects
November 21, 2025
- IDNR Food Storage Capacity Grant
Until funds exhausted
- Iowa DOT Speed Feedback Signs Program
Opens January 1, 2026
- IEDA Certified Local Government Program
Opens January 1, 2026
- IDOT RISE Grant
February 1, 2026
- CDBG Water and Sewer Program
Early 2026

From the Desk of the Executive Director...

John McCurdy

I'm extremely thankful and humbled to have had the opportunity to celebrate 50 years of SWIPCO this past week along with so many outstanding individuals and groups from Southwest Iowa. We were very honored to be able to present the first Ron Kohn Servant Leadership Award and it was an outstanding group that were nominated. It was a great inaugural "class" for an award that we look forward to giving every year into the future to recognize those individuals who lead by serving their communities, just like Ron did. If you're reading the newsletter and thinking, "so and so should have gotten an award," well, here's your invitation to nominate them next year.

One thing we learned from preparing for our 50th anniversary is that we have been horrible historians. Yes, we have data and reports on different grants we've worked on, houses we've fixed, and many statistics on SWITA. However, what we have been really not that good at over the years is capturing the human story and the impacts of all this work on the region. The impact is immensely fundamental. It's literally roofs over heads, trips to the store, and water from the faucet. We will have to do a better job over the next 50 years of keeping track of it all!

Finally, the biggest THANK YOU and CONGRATULATIONS goes out to the whole staff, more than 100 of them, who make SWIPCO and SWITA what we are. We're very blessed to have such hard working and intelligent people here that I'm blown away by every day. I can't say enough about them and cannot stress enough that the dollars and buses wouldn't matter one iota without their work.

P.S. I am writing this during a federal government shutdown. We are open and operating. Most of the grants that we work on were funded previously and we continue to work on them, or they are state or local funds and not subject to the shutdown. The federal folks that oversee public transit are working because they are funded by multi-year transportation bills and not subject to these types of shutdowns (what a concept, budgeting for more than a few months at a time, if it can be done by the Federal DOT...I digress!). However, some agencies that we do work with are closed. The US Economic Development Administration is closed. Most of Housing and Urban Development is closed. We were set to learn whether we have received another \$1.4 million grant to assist with lead-based paint issues and that is on hold during the shutdown. We, like most agencies, are going to continue to chug away at our work. If a shutdown continues for longer than approximately a month, I could see some larger impacts, so watch this space next month if we are still at an impasse!

SWIPCO STAFF

John McCurdy, AICP
Executive Director

Mark Lander
Transit Director

Daurine Petersen
Administrative Services Director

Rhonda Brown
Finance Manager

Brandie McFarland
Human Resources Specialist

Kersten Abild
Transit Scheduler II

Ann Anstey
Housing Programs Coordinator

Mary Auten
Grants Specialist I

Michael Ballinger
Safety Coordinator

Barb Boggs
Grants Specialist I

Dani Briggs
Lead Planner

Tracy Clark
Transit Scheduler III

Tammy DeBord
Grants Specialist III

Mark Hansen
Fleet Mechanic

Ashley Hayes
Disaster Recovery Coordinator

Julie Hays
Transit Scheduler I

Dee Holtz
Administrative Assistant

Holly Jackson
Planner I

Allyson Jones
Transit Scheduler I

Matthew Lee
Building Inspector II

Chris Parks
Communications Coordinator

Nicole Rhodes
Grants Specialist II

Phil Richter
Building Inspector I

Kyle Rock
Maintenance Assistant

Kristen Templeton
Transit Coordinator

Teresa Wright
Finance Specialist