

The Update



May 2026

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

SWITA Driver Steve Herrington Receives National "Frontline Hero" Award

OMAHA, Neb. — The Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) is proud to announce that Driver Steve Herrington has been nationally recognized as the 2026 Frontline Hero Award recipient by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), one of the public transportation industry's highest honors recognizing exemplary frontline service and dedication to community.

Herrington received the award on Wednesday, May 13th, during CTAA's National EXPO conference at the CHI Health Center in Omaha, where transportation professionals from across the country gathered to celebrate innovation, leadership, and excellence in community transportation.

Since joining SWITA in December 2022, Herrington has become known throughout the organization for his cheerfulness, professionalism, compassion, flexibility, and unwavering commitment to the



Herrington accepting his award on stage at CTAA EXPO in Omaha. (L-R: Todd Beutler, CTAA Board of Directors, SWITA Driver Steve Herrington, CTAA Executive Director Scott Bogren

people he serves. Riders, coworkers, dispatch staff, and community partners consistently praise his positive attitude, calm demeanor, and willingness to step forward whenever help is needed.

“SWITA drivers are special people and do an incredibly important but challenging job. Steve represents the best of what you want to see in a true Continued..

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Herrington CTAA Frontline Hero Award Continued...

public servant,” said Southwest Iowa Planning Council Executive Director John McCurdy. “I’ve never seen him without a positive attitude. He approaches every day with a genuine commitment to serving others. This national recognition is incredibly well deserved.”

Herrington’s impact extends far beyond safely transporting passengers. He regularly assists with training new drivers, adjusts his schedule to meet operational needs, and maintains a strong awareness of rider and community needs throughout southwest Iowa.

Although he goes above and beyond day in and day out, the award highlighted two moments over the past year to exemplify why Herrington was selected as a “Frontline Hero.”

In one instance, a young student rider passed away in a non-transit-related accident in Atlantic. Upon learning of the tragedy, before any formal call for help, Herrington immediately sprang into action to check on and console the family, almost all of whom were his riders. When SWITA employees organized an internal fundraiser to assist the family with expenses, Herrington personally delivered the donation.

The second occasion was during a fast-moving blizzard that shut down portions of Interstate 80 and stranded motorists in dangerous winter conditions, local authorities contacted SWITA for emergency assistance transporting stranded travelers to safe shelter. Herrington immediately volunteered to respond.

Navigating severe weather and hazardous road conditions, Herrington safely transported 20 stranded individuals, along with two cats and a dog, ten miles in near white out conditions into Atlantic for shelter and safety. After completing those emergency transports, he continued assisting the community by helping transport discharged hospital patients to shelter locations.

“This just goes to show how special Steve is, because he really stands out in a group of really good drivers and people that care,” said Southwest Iowa Transit Agency Transit Director Mark Lander. “For him to go to the top of that summit, that really shows something about Steve. I think throughout the state and throughout the country our rural transit drivers are really great.”

SWITA congratulates Steve Herrington on this outstanding national achievement and thanks him for the compassion, professionalism, and service he demonstrates every day across southwest Iowa.



Herrington on stage with the rest of the CTAA Award Winners.

SWITA Honors Top Drivers at Spring Meeting

ATLANTIC- Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) hosted their Spring Driver Meeting and Awards on Saturday, May 16th at the Cass County Community Center in Atlantic. Staff and drivers enjoyed a day of professional development and recognition.

Top honorees on the day were Leon Zaiger as Driver of the Year, Galen Gaer as the Kelly Davis Leadership Award recipient, and Steve Herrington with special recognition for his CTAA Frontline Hero Award. SWITA also recognized five Star Drivers from around the region: Pete Menke (Pottawattamie County), Michael Irvin (Mills County), Lavonda Eckley (Mills County), Mark Phippen (Cass County), and Rob Braunersrither (Shelby County).

Recognition was also given for milestone service years: Mike Rhode, 5 years; Mike Irvin, 5 years; Roger Jensen, 5 years; Ron Meier, 5 years; James Watson, 5 years; Shantal Martinez, 5 years; Bob Lytle, 10 years; Lynn Baumbach, 10 years; and Dwayne Hemminger, 20 years. Retired driver Brian Elliot was also honored for his 10 years of service and Gary Smithson for his 20 years of service.

SWITA takes pride in providing safe, reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation and these drivers gave exceptional commitment to that service this past year.

Driver of the Year Leon Zaiger has worked for SWITA since 2024, making a quick impact with his work. Leon has shown strong commitment to his work with skill behind the wheel, reliability, consistency, and a positive attitude. Leon is a leader by example, inspiring other drivers naturally. Leon keeps safety at the forefront and has been very trustworthy and professional.

The Kelly Davis Leadership Award was presented to Galen Gaer for his continued superior transit skills. Galen has been with SWITA for nearly 9 years and shows leadership through safe driving, willingness to learn new routes and assist when there is a scheduling bind. Galen does a great job helping other drivers and communicating effectively with staff. Riders enjoy his positive attitude and helpful nature.

SWITA also took time to recognize Driver Steve Herrington, who recently received

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L-R: SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander, SWITA Driver of the Year Leon Zaiger, SWITA Transit Coordinator Kristen Templeton

Driver Awards Continued....

the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) Frontline Hero Award. This award is given each year to an unsung individual that goes the extra mile time and time again and embodies the spirit and professionalism of the community transportation industry. Steve is a well-respected member of the team, and it was wonderful to see him get recognition on the national scale.

SWITA also received a CTAA Partnership Award for providing vehicles to use during the national driver rodeo that was held May 9-10th in Omaha, NE.

The meeting also featured safety discussions and education to ensure that proper procedures are being followed and that rides are delivered safely and efficiently each day.



L-R: SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander, Kelly Davis Leadership Award Winner Galen Gaer, SWITA Transit Coordinator Kristen Templeton



SWITA Star Drivers L-R: SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander, Rob Braunersrither, Lavonda Eckley, Mark Phippen, Mike Irvin, SWITA Transit Coordinator Kristen Templeton. (Not pictured: Pete Menke)

CDBG Programs Open Now for Applications

The Iowa Department of Economic Development is currently accepting applications for three Community Development Block Grant programs and some new programs were introduced earlier this year. Applications are now open through August 17, 2026, for Upper Story Housing, Commercial Facades, and Community Facilities.

These opportunities can create very impactful results for communities, but the application process can be complex and awards require adhering to many federal rules. SWIPCO is here to help communities write applications and see projects through to successful completion.



Upper Story Housing project in Atlantic

With the Upper Story Housing program the City is the applicant, and then has an agreement with the developer. A maximum of four units with \$100,000 per unit and a 10% minimum match. Only one upper story project per community can be underway at one time. Locations that would be eligible must have been unoccupiable for the last five years and an environmental review will be due at application. Once these units are completed a minimum of 51% of the units have to be rented to low to moderate income qualified renters and would need to follow HOME rent limits.



Stanton Downtown Revitalization

Commercial Facades (Formerly referred to as Downtown Revitalization or DTR) projects can be applied for by communities with less than 50,000 population or by Counties representing one or more of those sized communities. This program assists with impactful downtown exterior improvements that eliminate slum and blight conditions. Projects must have a minimum of 6 buildings/facades to apply and a minimum of 8 buildings/facades to receive full funding. The maximum grant amount is \$650,000. Project buildings must be situated within a downtown target area in which at least 25% of all buildings are determined to be in fair or poor condition.



Southwest Iowa Families mental health community facility in Clarinda

The Community Facilities program assists communities with infrastructure projects such as day care facilities, senior centers, vocational workshops, food pantries, physical or mental health facilities, and homeless centers. These facilities provide support for vulnerable populations, especially those of low- and moderate-income. \$1.8 million Continued..

CDBG Programs Continued...

dollars is available with maximum funding requests for each application at \$600,000.

New CDBG programs that were introduced in March and will have future availability include Roofing Replacement Program, Streetscapes, and Pocket Parks. The roofing replacement program will provide communities an opportunity to provide aid to low to moderate income individual homeowners of single family homes to replace roofing. The streetscapes program is aimed at revitalizing downtown districts with enhanced sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, wayfinding, and other public-realm features that strengthen commercial corridors and promote long-term economic vitality. The pocket parks program is intended to assist communities with developing new green spaces for recreational use on city-owned lots no bigger than a quarter acre.

If you have any questions or are interested in working on an application please contact SWIPCO offices at 712-243-4196 or email swipco@swipco.org

Garrett Recognized for SWIPCO Service

Recently retired Mayor of Atlantic Grace Garrett was recognized at the May SWIPCO Policy Council meeting for her 6 years of service on the board.



SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy presenting certificate of appreciation to Grace Garrett on May 28, 2026

SWITA Summer Fun Bus

**\$1 EACH WAY OR
\$40 FOR AN UNLIMITED SUMMER PASS**

WE PROVIDE RIDES TO:
SUMMER CAMPS & ACTIVITIES, VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL, GRANDMA'S HOUSE, FRIEND'S HOUSE, SWIMMING POOL, TENNIS LESSONS, PIANO LESSONS... AND MORE!

Monday - Friday
Students up to 12th grade
Parents and Caregivers ride free

Atlantic 7am-5pm
Glenwood 8am-5pm
Harlan 8am-5pm
Red Oak 8am-5pm
Shenandoah 8am-5pm

Open to the Public
Wheelchair Accessible

Register online at **SWITA.com**
or Call **712-243-2518**
OR **1-800-842-8065**

Birthdays & Anniversaries



Ann Anstey

Housing Programs Coordinator
Birthday Month



Dani Briggs

Lead Planner
Birthday Month
8 Years of Service



Dee Holtz

Administrative Assistant
Birthday Month



Kyle Rock

Maintenance Assistant
2 Years of Service

SWITA Recieves Partnership Award from CTAA

SWITA recently received a partnership award from the Community Transportation Association of America for helping to provide vehicles for their National Rodeo driver competition the weekend of May 9th and 10th at the CHI Center in Omaha, Nebraska.

SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander and Transit Coordinator Kristen Templeton accepted the award at the CTAA Rodeo Awards ceremony on May 10th.



Upcoming Grant

Information:

- Empower Rural Iowa - Variety of Grant Programs that open for applications July 1, 2026
- Iowa DOT State Recreational Trails Program July 1, 2026
- Iowa DNR Solid Waste Alternative Program July 1, 2026
- Iowa DNR Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program August 15, 2026
- Small Business Energy Audit Program May 1, 2029 (Ongoing, first-come basis until funds exhausted)

From the Desk of the Executive Director

John McCurdy

The 2026 Iowa Legislative Session is now in the rear-view mirror, and I know that many of you who may read this newsletter are city and county officials and are still digesting the impacts of the session. One item that has gone unnoticed by many is that the legislature passed and the governor signed the state budget and as part of that eliminated funding for Iowa's council's of governments (like SWIPCO). It wasn't a lot of money, \$350,000 inside the Iowa Economic Development budget, which in total is about \$9 million, split evenly between the 17 different COGs around Iowa. Some states invest much more in their versions of COGs. But the loss of those funds has an impact in very real terms. SWIPCO would have received \$20,000 from this allocation. Considering that our budget is around \$7 million, will this cut break us? No. However, not all COGs in Iowa are as diverse in their scope or funding. The smallest COG in Iowa has 2 employees. The loss of \$20,000 is a major blow to that organization and others like it.

Perhaps most importantly though is what we do with those funds. At SWIPCO, we use those funds to match a federal grant for regional economic development. That \$20,000 a year helps bring in an additional \$70,000 a year from the federal government—which we use to be in the community, provide technical assistance, write grants, and help small businesses with loan applications, among many other things. COGs in Iowa have shown over the years that every dollar invested in our work brings in more than \$150 from other sources. That's an incredible return on investment.

We will continue to work hard for Southwest Iowa and I thank everyone who does support Iowa's COGs.

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

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
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