Cherokee Strip Transit Director Honored at OTA Conference

Rita Kroll, Transit Director for Cherokee Strip Transit (CST), a division of Northern Oklahoma Development Authority (NODA), has been awarded the Public Transit Professional of the Year for 2015. The award was presented at the Oklahoma Transit Association Winter Conference on Feb. 4. Kroll has served as director of CST for 23 years, with two directors preceding her since its inception in 1991. Starting with one van and one employee CST has grown to 46 vehicles and 54 employees. The transportation project started out as a pilot program funded by a grant to provide transportation to the elderly in eastern Garfield County. After the funding ran out, Kroll and the one driver continued to operate by any means necessary; bake sales, memorials and meal services were some ways funds were raised. Hard work with great pride made their efforts successful. Becoming a Section 5311 provider and receiving funds from Oklahoma Dept. of Transportation (ODOT), along with the merger with NODA, started the beginning of great growth. CST went from serving only eastern Garfield County to currently providing transportation in all of Alfalfa, Blaine, Grant, Kingfisher and Noble Counties along with portions of Garfield and Kay.

"Serving the communities in CST service area has been a privilege" Kroll stated, and the impact is felt by those clients needing transportation to meet daily needs. She has also been involved in community affairs. Kroll and CST staff work with the Garber Community Improvement Association to plan and work special events for over 15 years, including a Community Easter Egg Hunt, 4th of July and the Annual Christmas Parade. When everyone works together in these efforts, all benefit and that’s important to Kroll and her staff.

Other awards for CST/NODA: 2008 Transit System of the Year; 2008 Project Manager of the Year (Kroll), and 2000 Harold Stansberry Award to Kroll and Laura Fair for recognition of efforts establishing and securing the future of CST. Shortly before CST received the award, Fair was killed in a motor vehicle accident. With the efforts of all the employees working for Cherokee Strip Transit, Fair’s dreams lives on.

Deadline approaching for CDBG Applications

Oklahoma Department of Commerce opened applications for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) in January. CDBG-REAP, and Community Re-vitalization project application deadlines were in February and March, respectively. Water/Wastewater Engineering and Construction applications deadline is May 2, 2016. These grants assist with engineering costs, administration costs, permit costs as well as construction costs for your water and wastewater projects. If interested contact Jennifer Firgard or Vicki Eggers for assistance. Remember, NODA does not charge you to write your application. This is part of your membership.
OARC Legislative Reception

On Feb. 10 legislators and sub-state directors gathered to discuss key issues at the Faculty House, OU Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. The event was hosted by Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils (OARC).

State Budget Cuts Cause Reduction in REAP Funds

Oklahoma’s revenue for the current fiscal year have been down and Secretary Preston Doerflinger (director of Office of Management and Enterprise Services – OMES) has declared a revenue failure and reduced monthly general revenue allocations to state agencies. This falls in line with the Oklahoma constitution which requires the state to have a balanced budget (unlike the federal government). This budget cut has affected the Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) program in two cuts, a 3% cut on Jan, 1, and a 4% cut on March 1, 2016. This is the first time REAP has been given a mid-year budget cut.

Because NODA awarded all of its FY16 REAP allocations in December we were left with having to pass the budget cuts along to the recipients, which was difficult for us to do. We know how much these communities need our assistance. We are looking into steps to take to prevent this from occurring again.

There has been some talk that if Oklahoma’s economy does not turn around soon some programs, such as REAP, could be reduced, or possibly eliminated, from the FY17 budget. Because of turnover in legislators recently not all legislators understand what REAP means to the rural communities it serves. Please consider, and urge your staff and board members, to contact your legislators to let them know how important the REAP program is to your rural community. To find out who your legislators are go to: http://www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature2.aspx?State=OK.
Transportation Stakeholders Meetings Scheduled in April

As part of a pilot project with the Oklahoma Dept. of Transportation (ODOT) long range transportation plans (LRTP) are being developed by NODA staff for the Northern Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NORTPO), a division of NODA.

Kay County’s LRTP was the first plan to be completed and approved last year, and submitted to ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Staff currently are working on Grant and Noble Counties’ plans and have scheduled public stakeholder meetings in April for each county.

Grant County’s stakeholder meeting will be held April 5 in the Medford Fire Department training/conference room at 1 pm. The NORTPO technical committee will hold a meeting in Medford on May 5 at 1 pm at the same location.

Noble County’s stakeholder meeting will be on April 12, 1 pm, at the Noble County Fairgrounds’ concessions building in Perry. June’s technical committee meeting will be held at the same location at 1 pm on June 2.

Please join us with your input on transportation in Grant and Noble Counties!

New Vans for CST

The Cherokee Strip Transit logs thousands of miles connecting veterans, seniors, youths and others with educational training, employment, health care and other vital services. That can take a toll on their vehicles. CST applied for the FTA through ODOT’s Ladders of Opportunity grant and was awarded funds to purchase two new transit vans (below). "Our new vehicles offer continued support to our patrons so they can provide for their families and achieve a better quality of life," says Rita Kroll, CST Director.
OARC Conference held March 3-4
Staff from Oklahoma’s 11 councils of government (COGs) gathered in Norman, Okla., for two days of training at the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils (OARC) conference. Attending for NODA were (l-r): Vicki Eggers, Shannon Ball, Susmita Som, Jennifer Firgard, Michelle Emmerson, Cecil Michael, and Payton Herron.

Who Represents You in Our Legislatures?
Do you know who all the legislators are who represent you at the state and federal levels? The Oklahoma State Legislature has a website where you can type in your address (or just your zip code) to find your Oklahoma Senate and House representatives, and your US Senate and House representatives. It lists their name and a picture of them. To find their contact information click on the name/picture and it gives you their office addresses, phone numbers, website, committees they serve on, and a biography. Just go to http://www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature2.aspx?State=OK.
Your legislators are to represent YOU in state and federal issues, keep them informed of YOUR concerns.