



Ohio Public Transit Association News Release

For Immediate Release

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Ohio Transit Association Recognizes Industry Leadership Announcing Annual Excellence Award Recipients

Columbus, OH -- The Board of Directors of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) announced the recipients of their annual Excellence Awards. OPTA will recognize the award recipients at the [Ohio Needs Transit Conference](#) on September 17.

OPTA's Excellence Awards 2021 honor individuals and organizations who have exemplified leadership and advocacy for public transit in Ohio. Transit employees, board members and community stakeholders statewide are recognized for their innovation and commitment to the transit industry. The 2021 recipients are:

Leonard Ronis Award: Chuck Rector, Board of Trustees/Retiree, METRO RTA

Mobility Manager Award: Tim Miller, former Preble County Mobility Manager (posthumously)

Legislator of the Year Award: Senator Stephanie Kunze, Ohio Senate District 16

Four under Forty Award:

- Mark Samaan, Service Planner III, SORTA
- Jeffrey R. Macko, Planning Team Leader, GCRTA
- Clayton Popik, Director of Planning, PARTA
- Jarrod Hampshire, Director of Maintenance, METRO RTA

Milestone Award:

- Michael Cassinelli, Bus Operator, SORTA
- Wayne Schlee, Bus Operator, Laketrans
- Mike Ripplinger, Journeyman Mechanic and Steward of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local #348, METRO RTA

Associate Engagement: Masabi, EZfare project

Collaborative Excellence Award: Ben Capelle, CEO, Laketrans, Lake County Mobile Food Pantry

Community Impact Award:

- Orlando Epps, Bus Operator/Veterans Employee Resource Group Chair, COTA
- Peggy Bakewell, Transit Driver, Knox Area Transit

Lifetime Achievement:

- Mary Dailey, Athens Public Transit, Administrator (posthumously)
- Mark Donaghy, Retired, Greater Dayton RTA
- Denny Schooley, Executive Director, Delaware County Transit

“The OPTA Board applauds our award winners for their leadership and passion,” said Claudia Amrhein, president of the OPTA Board and general manager of Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority.

“While 2020 offered unforeseen challenges, it also presented many opportunities for our members to serve and innovate. In the past year, transit has played a critical role in helping communities combat the overwhelming challenges presented by COVID-19. Our industry worked tirelessly to keep public transit a safe space so essential workers could rely on us when the world needed them most.

We fed the elderly and vulnerable by bringing food to their front doors because it was unsafe for them to leave their homes. And when residents needed to get vaccinated, our transit systems guaranteed all Ohioans had access they needed.”

In addition to its members, OPTA will recognize Senator Stephanie Kunze (D-16) for her instrumental role in securing an increase in state spending for transit by \$13.85 million per year for a total of \$74 million a year from the General Revenue Fund for urban and rural transit systems in the recent biennium state budget.

“Senator Kunze understands the critical role that public transportation plays in the future of our state and communities,” said OPTA Executive Director Matt Carle. “Strong public transportation systems can transform lives and economies. Thanks to Senator Kunze, we look forward to increasing accessibility, while protecting one of the most affordable transportation options for Ohioans.”

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OPTA is the primary advocate for public transportation in Ohio. The Association provides leadership, resources, training, support, technical assistance, media outreach, public engagement, and governmental relations services to public and private transit agencies and businesses across the state.