

REFLECTIONS ON OUR BEGINNINGS (1984 – 1996)

Ted Radke, Corunna ON

(Member, Seniors Needs Study Committee and initial Mobility Bus Committee, later Administrator, Ritz Lutheran Villa 1988-1996)

- **A seniors needs study was carried out in 1984 by Cynthia Walkom. Results from this survey indicated a need for specialized transportation services. Persons with disabilities, seniors with limited mobility, and others expressed a desire to see some type of service available. Taxi service was not always available and often not appropriate.**
- **A public meeting in the spring of 1985 led to the affirmation that specialized transportation would be a great asset in our community, would promote independence and improve quality of life among many seniors and disabled persons in the community. I was privileged to chair that gathering on behalf of the Seniors Needs Committee. However, the possibility of purchasing and operating a vehicle was deemed premature at this time.**
- **Two community service organizations, the Mitchell Lions Club and the Mitchell Kinsmen Club expressed a definite interest in supporting a project to bring a transportation service into our community.**
- **In September of 1985, it was determined to launch a mobility bus service on an experimental basis – for a 9-month trial period. A mini-bus with lift was chartered from Sherwood Bus Lines and service was offered on Tuesdays from 10 AM – 2 PM. Fare was set at \$.50. The service was officially launched on Tuesday October 1, 1985.**
- **Members of the initial Mobility Bus committee were:
Ted Radke (chair) and Fred Herbert as community representatives
Derek Yeadon and Jim Heckman representing Mitchell Kinsman
Brock Hall and Bill Smith representing Mitchell Lions**
- **With the addition of another community service organization, the Mitchell Legion, and the development of outreach services by Ritz Lutheran Villa and support from the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), a vision to expand the localized service became more of a possibility.**
- **In 1988 a former TTC Wheel-Trans vehicle, purchased at auction by Adrian Olsthoorn of the Regal Truck Centre, was made available to the Villa at cost. With support from the MCSS and the Villa, the 1980 Thomas bus was refurbished and equipped to begin service in Mitchell for a cost of \$ 6,000+, substantially less than the \$ 60,000 required to purchase a new vehicle. The bus finally hit the road on June 27, 1989 offering a total of 11 hours of service a week in place of the original 4 hours. The bus now operated on Tuesdays from 10-3 and on Fridays from 10-4. Fares were increased to \$ 1.00. The bus was owned by the Villa and supported through MCSS subsidies and generous donations from the 3 service organizations – Lions, Kinsmen, Legion.**

- The bus was also used in 1989 to provide transportation for the new VON Adult Day Centre on Tuesdays and to transport Mitchell seniors to an 8-week program of aquatic exercises at the Spruce Lodge pool in Stratford.
- By the early 1990's an additional 3 hours was added to the Mobility Bus schedule, offering service on Wednesdays from 10-1. By 1992 bus usage totaled some 3,200 trips, with more than 100 individuals using the service.
- The time had come to consider the purchase of a new bus. A number of factors were in play, one that curtailed the MCSS from subsidizing transportation services after March 31, 1993, and the need to have a more modern and reliable vehicle in operation. Under the new arrangement, transportation subsidy would come from the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) and channeled through the local municipality.
- Fundraising for the new bus started early in 1992. By May of that year some \$9,000 had already been pledged. A goal of some \$ 32,000 was set, approximately ½ of the cost of a new vehicle – with the other 50% hopefully met by the MTO. Fundraising was spectacular – a total of \$ 45,000 was raised throughout the community, with gifts from individuals, organizations, service clubs, nursing homes, etc. About \$ 35,500 of those funds was directed toward the \$ 66,500 purchase price of the new vehicle, with the province (MTO) providing \$ 31,000.
- The new bus was a CHAMPION Challenger built on a Ford F-350 chassis with a 7.3 litre diesel engine, and providing seating for 12 walk-on passengers and 2 wheelchairs, with possible adaptation to accommodate 5 wheelchairs. A public ceremony was held on July 8, 1993 at the Mitchell Town Hall to mark the initiation of the new bus into service.
- By 1993 service hours had increased to 21 per week, with the bus now operating on 4 days – Tuesday through Friday. The bus was also available through a charter arrangement to area nursing homes for special trips such as scenic drives, farm tours, or shopping excursions.
- Budgeted costs for the service in 1993-1994 amounted to just under \$ 27,000, with user fees and local grants providing about \$ 9,000 and MTO subsidy providing \$ 18,000.
- Words that come to mind to describe the success of the establishment and ongoing operation of the MOBILITY BUS during the first 10 years of operation:

**PARTNERSHIP
COOPERATION**

Partners included:

- **Villa (initially Administrator Brock Hall, Board of Directors, later staff Laurie Moore and Patti Down, Bus coordinators)**
- **Service Clubs – Lions, Kinsmen, later Legion**
- **Wider community – many individual citizens and groups supported fundraising efforts**
- **Area nursing homes – Mitchell NH, VersaCare Hillside**
- **Municipalities (Town of Mitchell liaison was Jim Demerling, Deputy Clerk)**
- **Provincial government representatives – MCSS (David Harvey, Jim Hignett), later MTO**