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How a CT bus driver makes job go ‘beyond transportation.’ Rider says: ‘He has that humanity thing’

By Pamela McLoughlin | Hartford Courant
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Geary Rogers, 54, a bus driver since 1996 – most of them for River Valley Transit – is a rare find among riders and his supervisor. (Contributed)

Geary Rogers is both a full-time bus driver and full-time pastor, but it's tough to tell where his two careers begin and end.

It seems he's doing God's work 24 hours a day.

Rogers, 54, a bus driver since 1996 — most of them for River Valley Transit — is a rare find among riders and his supervisor.

He de-escalates potentially sticky situations like a pro, gives his riders words of hope and encouragement, and implores them to keep trying for goals.

But he also knows how to say, “no,” without any pushback. “We all have different things going on in our life. I think what if it was me? Would I want someone to have mercy on me?” Geary said. “If they see dark but with all they

experience with me they see light, I've done something.”

As in his pastor role, Rogers isn't just about words, he's also a doer.

If someone's short on bus fare and needs a ride to work or a medical appointment, for example, Rogers reaches into his own pocket and pays.

If they're hungry, he'll give them his own sandwich or a gift card for food.

If a rider or someone in their family is hospitalized, Rogers will visit to pray with them and he's even done funerals for free.

“It's not a job, it's a ministry,” he said of driving. “Things

go beyond transportation.”

Rogers is a full-time pastor at his small, non-denominational Mount Sinai Ministry in Middletown where parishioners are like family as are his riders.

Joe Comerford, executive director of River Valley Transit, which operates all over Middlesex County, said Rogers is “great” and customers love him.

“People (the public) can be challenging and he has understanding and knows not to take it personally,” Comerford said. “It takes certain traits to be a pastor and they translate well to what he does.”

Sometimes those with a monthly pass will go to hub in Middletown and hop on Rogers’ bus just to talk to him, his boss and customers say.

Regular bus rider Angela Bautista said of Rogers, “He always puts a smile on my face.”

Bautista said Rogers often has conversations with people who ride the bus and he encourages them no matter their troubles.

“He has that humanity thing,” which she added is all too rare these days.

Frequent rider Debbie Clark has conversations with Rogers all the time.

“Geary is a sweetheart,” Clark said. “He’s always with a smile and friendly.”

Bus driving was a childhood dream

Rogers’ goal from childhood in Middletown was to drive a bus.

“It’s not a job to me. It’s a career,” he said. “To have people view you as their family, not their driver.”

He remembers as a child riding to South Carolina often with his dad in a Peter Pan bus and admiring the bus driver because he made so many happy by taking them places.

Then early on he got a toy bus and played with often, pretending to be the driver.

“I thought, ‘One day I’m going to drive a bus,’ “Rogers said. His first driving job was for Napa Auto Parts, Rogers said. “I enjoyed that and thought, ‘How can I further my career?’”

He started as a driver in 1996 driving a school bus for Dattco bus company, then quickly got the big break with what is now known as River Valley Transit.

“I love it,” he said of driving a bus. “I like the impact of making a positive impact in someone’s life. I love the public and helping them to have a great day or a better day.”

Rogers, who drives a quiet electric bus, said he likes that people “from all walks of life” and ages ride the bus – educators, students, medical professionals, food workers, car sales people among them.

The riders are like family and help him too

Just as he helps riders, they help him through good conversation, passing on knowledge, he said.

“I find all these things exciting and joyous,” he said.

Rogers said he’s already had passengers “who were little kids with their legs swinging” return as adults.

Rogers said he loves that, “People say, ‘I feel safe when I ride with him.’”

Rogers most often urges riders, “Don’t give up.”

He sees many elderly without families going to the doctor and maybe considering not going to that last chemotherapy appointment.

“I tell them, ‘Don’t give up, you’re going to beat this. We need you,’ “Rogers said. “If people are negative, I try to bring positivity.”

He counsels people on the bus through divorces, breakups, sickness, family problems, financial woes, and schooling. He even helped a running woman escape a rapist by stopping the bus, Rogers said.

He said, “Sometimes people feel lost as if no one cares.”

“It’s a blessing to be a help to them and they can help me,” Rogers said. “Your heart goes out to them.”

As for the pastor role, that was a natural.

“I’ve been going to church all my life It’s in me,” he said. “We all are children of God. We all are somebody.”