

Travel Training Experience a Success!

The Travel Trainer for Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) is Mr. Jim Van Pelt. As the Travel Trainer, Jim helps people understand at a functional level, how to utilize the MCAT fixed route bus system, thereby providing citizens, particularly those with disabilities, new freedom and independence in their everyday lives. Jim takes the time to understand each person's individual travel needs, and tailor the travel training program for these specific needs, and in accordance with each person's functional abilities. There are also situations where Jim can assist a group of people learn how to complete specific bus trips for group events and social outings.

On Wednesday, March 21st, 2018, Jim scheduled a group of eight women from Holy Cross Manor, a senior retirement center in Palmetto for bus travel to Ellenton Outlet Mall. Since it is a training event, Jim showed the group proper procedure for riding buses including: How to read a route schedule, how to pay a fare, when/where to wait for the bus, where to get off the bus, and asking the Transit Operator for help, if needed, etc.

On this trip, the Route 201 (i.e., the North County ConneXion) bus left Holy Cross Manor at 10:10 am. After arriving at the downtown Bradenton Transit Station, the bus turned into Route 1, which went to the Ellenton Outlet Mall. Since November, 2016, MCAT interlined all the Palmetto-area bus routes for improved operating efficiency and system connectivity, and now these routes serve the downtown Bradenton Transit Station. The interlining of Palmetto-area bus routes, makes it was easier for the Holy Cross group to complete their trip, since they did not have to transfer buses.

Arriving at the Outlet Mall at 11:20am, the women scattered, walked around and could be seen travelling in smaller groups all over the mall. The entire group then met at the Outlet Mall bus stop around 2:00 pm for the return trip, leaving at 2:20 pm.

The return trip was quite enjoyable; the Holy Cross resident were happy and gregarious, laughing and talking. It seems the trip to the Mall "pumped them up" and this joy was contagious and seemed to spread to the other people on the bus. The Holy Cross residents were dropped off at the Holy Cross bus stop at 4:10 pm, and while de-boarding, they all thanked Jim for the great time they had.

After the trip, Jim shared with MCAT staff that the Holy Cross travel training event "made me feel like my job is much more than just teaching people to ride the bus. I think it helps people, who were previously stuck in a rut, to get out and enjoy life and make their lives much more fulfilling."

Way to go Jim!

