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Frontline Employees at Island Transit Honored with ‘Thank You Friday’ Lunch

Coupeville, WA – Some of the unsung heroes of the pandemic are hard to find. Today the ‘Thank You Friday’ volunteers found them among the employees of Island Transit, serving them lunch in honor of their selfless service to keep essential public transportation running during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic despite all the uncertainty of the situation.

“This crisis has been tough on everyone,” says Shawn Harris, Operations Manager at Island Transit. “We’ve completely changed the way we run things in a very short amount of time. While others stayed home, our employees showed up for work every day and worked the frontline.”

As news of the pandemic rolled out, Island Transit moved first to its Emergency Service Plan and then reduced service even further two weeks later as the Governor announced the Stay Home Stay Healthy initiative. Operators continued to run the buses for essential workers to access their jobs and for others to access essential items like groceries, while other staff put new health and safety procedures in place to prevent the spread of the virus. Daily sanitizing of buses and facilities; organizing volunteers to make masks; installing Plexiglas on buses to support social distancing for operators and passengers; and taking temperatures daily before coming to work all became their new way of working.

“There’s been a lot of work behind the scenes to make sure people could get where they needed to go during this crisis,” says Harris. “This lunch is much deserved and a really nice gesture of appreciation on the part of the Thank You Friday volunteers.”

Thank You Fridays is a volunteer group that has been raising money and buying lunches as a way to support local businesses and thank frontline workers. In the past few weeks, they’ve delivered more than 280 lunches to workers at local hospitals, pharmacies, senior centers and the post office.

“I woke up one day and thought we should do something, “says MacKenzie Ball, leader of the Thank You Friday lunch effort. “Essential workers have been part of the COVID-19 fight and supported the community early. We just want to thank them.”
Ball set up a Go Fund Me fundraiser which started six weeks ago. Her goal was to raise $1,000, but the fund collected over $1,800. “It’s also a way to give back to local restaurants,” she says. During Phase 1 of the state’s Stay Home Stay Healthy initiative, restaurants could only offer take-out food service. Many restaurants had to close.

Ball and her volunteers have been serving lunches at two locations every Friday for several weeks. Today the group delivered 35 individually-wrapped lunches to Island Transit employees from Zanini’s Catering, a home catering business in Oak Harbor run by Auntie Jackie.

This is the last delivery Thank You Fridays will be doing, says Ball. “We just wanted to give a little extra help to local restaurants and share our appreciation to essential workers during the early stages of the pandemic.”

Island Transit has been operating on a reduced Emergency Service Plan since March. The agency hopes to begin to restore service within two weeks of Phase 3 of the Washington Safe Start plan. Normally, the agency operates 15 bus routes with 26 vehicles and 68 operators.

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Island Transit serves Whidbey and Camano Islands in Island County. The mission of Island Transit is to provide safe, accessible, convenient, and friendly public transportation services which enhance our Island quality of life.