



Communications Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 19, 2016

Contact: Bill Campbell
Director of Communications
870-932-1052 (o), 870-919-7042 (c)
wcampbell@jonesboro.org

Black promoted to JET director

Michael Black has been named transit coordinator over of the City of Jonesboro's JET transportation system after a lengthy search.

Black, 53, has served as transportation supervisor the past four years, assisting Steve Ewart, who is retiring after eight years as JET director. Together, they oversaw huge growth in the public transit service. Black and Ewart have been with JET since 2008.

"Top priorities will be to enhance the service and promote public transit in the most positive light," said Black, who began his career with the city in code enforcement. He previously worked in auto parts management for a local dealership and managed an auto parts store.

Mayor Harold Perrin said Black was chosen because he "knows the system. He's run the day to day operations, and we are confident that he will do a great job and carry on what Steve started."

Ewart, 70, said he had intending to retire almost since the day he began the job, but the need for service kept him at work.

"In 2008, I thought I'd work two years," Ewart said. "Two turned into four, four turned into six, and six turned into eight."

Perrin said Ewart has been the face of JET, both publicly and behind the scenes.

"Steve is the ultimate public servant," Perrin said. "No one could have done a finer job getting that program up to speed, and I personally am grateful to Steve Ewart for what he's done for Jonesboro. Every day he came to work, he put our citizens first."

Ewart was a member of the committee that first began resurrecting the public bus service in 2000, when he served as director of adult education for Craighead County. In that capacity, he quickly recognized how seriously Jonesboro needed public transportation.

“I was in adult education, and adult education is workforce education – getting people trained,” he said. “People were getting jobs and were given vouchers for their first few weeks of work and training, but then they were paying for taxi cabs to get to work.

“I looked around at other cities, and they had public transportation. It became a no-brainer that we needed transportation.”

That was 10 years ago. In that decade, JET grew from a program that served a small number of Jonesboro residents to one that now provides five fixed routes and a complementary paratransit service for those with mobility challenges. It makes 140 stops throughout mid-town, north, west, northwest, and south central Jonesboro. Last year, more than 100,000 trips were registered on the JET system.

“I believe in it more now than I did back then,” Ewart said. “We’re providing people of all walks of life to have transportation all around the city. Most are transit-needy, but we have a lot more college students than we used to, and a lot more international people. As the Millennials ascend, they’re going to demand it. A lot of them don’t want or can’t afford cars. It’s going to be a piece in Jonesboro’s transportation matrix for some time to come.”

Ewart said his future plan is to “keep being Steve.

“I’ve had an adult life as a teacher, coach, administration, minister and transit director – always working for people. That’s about as rich as it gets.”

###