

Robin Phillips

Hi, I'm Robin Phillips, and this podcast is a chance for you to get to know some of your peers better and share their experiences and yours too, with other rural and tribal transit people. Our conversation today is with George Levitsky, the transit manager for Fairmont Marion County Transit in Fairmont, West Virginia. And it's serving Marion County and adjacent destinations reaching up to Morgantown and down to Clarksburg VA Hospital. George was on the national r a review board and served as the chair. In his final year. He agreed to help us launch this new project and share information about his program and the story of his challenges, providing transit services to an extended area and building and maintaining Fairmont Marion County Transit System. So George, hello there.

George Levitsky

Hello, Robin. We are, we are live and ready to go.

Robin Phillips

Oh my gosh. It's all, it's, you know, it's worth the work. Why don't you explain to me where is Fairmont?

George Levitsky

Well, Robin, we're in north central West Virginia. We're about 25 minutes south of Morgantown, about 35 minutes from the state line of Pennsylvania, and about an hour and a half to Pittsburgh. And, a lot of things are done on the I 79 corridor that, that we can talk about probably later. But, here in Fairmont, we are located in that strategic area where we are by a lot of medical facilities and being able to reach a lot of people. We are rural where Morgantown is a is an urban agency. Yeah.

Robin Phillips

What's your fleet size like? How many, how many buses are you running?

George Levitsky

Well, we have 28 accessible buses and we have a spare ratio of about four. And, our city is about the size of 18,000. 394 in the county of Marion has about 56,709. Ooh. And, that's, that's who we serve. And, that's important because the levy is voted on by the entire county,

Robin Phillips

So you get money from the county.

George Levitsky

We, our taxpayers help us out greatly.

Robin Phillips

Why do you think they do that, George? Have you been talking to them?

George Levitsky

We feel we have a good service. You know, the thing is, it's the people that vote and our levy is up every four years, and we do it on a primary election strategically. And we also do it when there's not a governor's or a presidential race, which seems to be a, a little better time for us to do it.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Well, that's a good thing to know. About how far away is your main medical center?

George Levitsky

Well, we do have a, a medical center that is Todd, it's, it's within the city of Fairmont, but it had recently closed. And, WVU u has opened up the emergency room and about 10 beds. We're in the process of WVU creating another small hospital along the new gateway that we have that again, we'll talk about in a little bit. Yeah. And Mon Healthcare Center is also going to put in a, another small hospital. So we're trying to reach out to a lot of areas. And then again, we're 25 minutes away from our university hospital, and the Mon Hospital is there, and then about 20 minutes south is the VA hospital, everything being right off the I 79 corridor.

Robin Phillips

Right. Cause I noticed that you provide service in like a three county area.

George Levitsky

Yeah. You know, mainly on I 79 now, we do have logistic care for NEMT, and they like to count as the crow flies, but, we travel the main roads.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Well, N D likes it, mileage by the mile, not by, you know, as the bus goes, not as the crow flies <laugh>. Yeah. Yeah. So, George, what happened? How did you wake up and become a transit manager? What, what, what happened?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, I was in the coal mines for 20 years, and I got laid off there, here in West Virginia. You know, back in 1968, there was a mine explosion in number nine. And that was, right, right near our area, right where I grew up. And, our, our family had a grocery store and a furniture store that burned down a week before the mine blew up. And, my little league coach was also a volunteer fireman, and he worked in the coal mines, and he was trying to help somebody get out where there was actually four deaths at the time, and he missed work the day that the mine blew up. He was supposed to be there. So that's just a little bit about my area, but when, when I first started as a manager, I was hired as a manager.

George Levitsky

So that, that first day when I was introduced everybody, there, there were probably 30 or 40 people that applied for the job. And I was very fortunate to get it. They were looking for a financial background and management skills person. So, when I was introduced, I had the manager with me a couple months when I was, was first here before I took over. So I had to rely on the system manager. And then after the meeting, the system manager said, you know, I wish you would've told the guys to really respect me as assistant manager. And I didn't know that he wasn't already sending man assistant manager. So that was surprise to me as well. So I relied on him and it worked out well, you know that day you think, Ooh, did I, what'd I get myself into? But here, 18 years later, I'm still here. So it must have been, okay.

Robin Phillips

So if you were your own mentor 18 years ago, what would you tell yourself? What would you now tell yourself then?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, you just wanna be yourself. You want to be consistent and really, really not show any favoritism. I mean, those are types of things that I try to, to do to make our organization,

Robin Phillips

I know, cuz you walked in here with an accounting background, but transit's a little different.

George Levitsky

Yeah. I mean, but it, in a way, it helped us save some money because we didn't have to go out and get a third party in as an accountant. And a lot of times I can do all of our quarterly reports or W2 s and things of that nature. The only time we spend money is, is when we do our annual audit. Audit mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, you know, talking about being a certified community trans manager from CTAA, they kind of want you to be a manager for five years. And it really takes that amount of time to get settled in and know, a lot of the in and out. So, I stood back and kind of watched and, you know, used management skills from, from other jobs to, to help me with this. You know, everything ties together.

Robin Phillips

So, what do you think was most important of the skills you brought to the table when you walked in there? Obviously they wanted someone that had a financial background, but what is it for you that, of your skillset that you felt was the most useful?

George Levitsky

So, what I tried to do is just manage people, be fair to people. You know, when I came in, because I came out of public accounting, you know, they would ask me about tax returns and things like that. And when I first got them, it wasn't bad. But now, 18 years later, the laws have changed so much, it makes it harder. But I believe they respected that I treated people fairly, mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, you know, whenever I, I take on something, you know, you, you read about it. The state of West Virginia is very good about sending us to different conferences, giving us a chance to go and even because of the levy, we have some extra funds where we can go to conferences. And, you know, that two months that I spent with the past manager, mm-hmm. <affirmative>, one week I spent at a training with Michael Noel in Ocean City, Maryland. And, that was, you know, even early on, it was, it was a good time. And, you know, you network with managers around the region. And even another manager, assistant manager in Petersburg, West Virginia was there. So we have friendships that last a long time and the networking where if you do have questions, you can get a hold of.

Robin Phillips

So, did you call people up after these, these events and talk to them? Or did you, when you had questions, did you go back? What did, how did you build and manage and develop that network?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, again, you call when you need to. A lot of times we figure things out and a lot of the employees here might have gone through that before, really didn't have a whole lot of contact with the

previous manager. But in West Virginia, we would generally have managers meeting about once a month or every other month. And we have an annual conference room, we get together, and then we have a manager's meeting, where, where we get together. So those, those type of things were very helpful.

Robin Phillips

So, what do you think was the most difficult thing you ran into as a transit manager that surprised you?

George Levitsky

Well, people knowing what we do. That, you know, even though when I was hired here, it was 30 years old, established in 1973, they would say, well, they would see our buses and say, well, well, what do they do? Just like, you know, my logo, people didn't know what it stood for. So that's what I put out to do is, is make us be more relevant, make us be more noticeable. What does that mean? So I got involved in the community and got on a lot of boards. I came in as a board member on the Fairmont Federal Credit Union. And then, we have a thing called Leadership Marion here in Marion County, where we network with a lot of city/county business people throughout the county. And from there, I got on the Marion County Chamber of Commerce. And, from the Marion County Chamber of Commerce, I eventually got on the Leadership Marion board. So, you make contacts that way and people start saying, oh, I didn't know you did that. And, I always try to have the FM on, especially during working hours and a lot of times after hours as well.

Robin Phillips

Believe the FM What's the FM?

George Levitsky

Well, Fairmont Marion, and back in 2015 when RTAP had a conference in Denver, my presentation that I had was for the development of the logo and the way it started, the FM had a mm-hmm. <affirmative>, a vertical letterhead that had the Fairmont Marion County. And underneath the event was transit authority. So we started out with a vertical with all the writing of the name and everything. And then I said, well, I wanna make a little bit more horizontal, so the blue F and the red M and then I put Fairmont Marion County Transit Authority underneath of it. So then I fine tune a little more and do the blue and the red, just the FM. And then finally we came out with the red and the blue with the white outline, so mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And now before people say, well, what, what does that mean? And I would say Fairmont Marion County Transit. Now, they would come up to me and say, well, my grandfather worked for you. My uncle worked for you.

George Levitsky

I ride the bus. I take the bus to school. So now they recognize what the logo stands for and you know, we get people to call, you know, I, I had a Cub Scout mother call one time, and she says, you know, I want to teach him how to ride the bus. And she says, and the reason I'm doing this is cause my car broke down and I had to use your bus to go to Anthony Chevrolet and use it. And that's what made me think about as a den mother, putting it through my Cub Scouts. And that was, that was really neat to hear.

Robin Phillips

Yeah, I think that building on community goodwill and engaging, and that seems like a really important part of a successful system is people don't ask you, is this for me? They know. It's like, how can I use it? Is

the question instead of, can I use it? But you can't stop marketing. That's the thing, is you just can't stop marketing.

George Levitsky

Yeah. And that's the hard part. You know, newspaper, you know, I first started was pretty big, and we would get some really good deals on front page every other week. And, what I would do is highlight a driver, you know mm-hmm. <affirmative>, my name is, or highlight a passenger or, say some things that are happening or, drivers that won an award or things that were coming up, those type of things. And that was real good back then. But now, you know, with social media being a little more, you know, you're, you're on there a little bit more. And, the levy, we use the radio, when it's levy time, television's a little expensive, but we've partnered with the park and rec and the library, which have their levies at the same time we do. But there, we all have our own separate stuff.

Robin Phillips

Right. So what do you think the key is to surviving?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, be consistent? I, I believe, you know, we pride ourselves in really not having to change our 12 regular routes. That, that we do keep our times the same. You know, we have non-union drivers, keep a fair price for it. You know, there was only one time that the fares changed since 1973. And in 1978, they went down a quarter because the levy passed. And we've stayed the same ever since. And we have zone fares start at 50 cents and go to \$2 for our Allen County rides. So, they go a quarter at a time.

Robin Phillips

So, you're a certified community transportation manager. How does that help you with your job?

George Levitsky

Well, again, like I spoke earlier, you know, it's good to have that where you need to be in it for five years before, before you apply. Again, you know, networking, I keep, keep talking about that. You know, you, you meet people and by going to the CTAA conference over the years, you get to meet a lot of people. And, you know, I was very fortunate in 2009 to be manager of the year for the CTAA, which I'm very proud of that. And, you know, I was in public accounting, so, you know, there are CPAs, the CTAA Certified Community Transit Manager is a certification. It shows our community that we're trying to keep up with what's going on, and we're not just trying to do the status quo.

Robin Phillips

George, I don't think you ever do the status quo.

George Levitsky

<laugh> Well, you know, we try to be flexible and then we do what we can. You know what I mean? Yep. You know, there's rules and I know where I work before you, there's a fine line there, and you want to just tread on the edge sometimes.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Well, the thing is that what is your goal? And the rules are trying to help you get to that goal. But sometimes you have to be on the edge of the rule on one side or the other to really achieve that in your community. Right. Because, you know, every system is different. And, one of the things that I've seen with Rural Transit and Community Transit is the system is a reflection of the community and the reflection of community values that your community passes your levy every time it comes up, that says that what you do is valuable to them. And I think that that's really important for you. And what you said earlier about what's important is being relevant to the community so that they think of you, and they think of you as part of the community. And I think that that's something that is a change for people. You don't just run buses, you provide access and mobility for people. And that's, that's a really different thing than just running a bus. So, what are you most proud of achieving?

George Levitsky

We had a transfer station, you know, we're hub and spoke with, we have paratransit, and we have, like I said, the 12 fixed routes. There's been a few that we've kind of changed a little bit since I've gone here. But it is still, the routes are there to just change, just a tad bit. We acquired a building, like three blocks from here. The one by the county courthouse was kinda on an incline. And when they're on the hour, we would be double parked in the road. And, you know, we made some congestion in the city, so we were able to move down there. I was worried that, that we wouldn't be able to get in and out.

George Levitsky

But man, it, it's really turned out to be a nice addition. We've got a four story building. We're only using the ground floor, but I, I believe people really like it, you know, before now, now we have a restroom. We have someone manning the transfer station five days a week. We run our regular routes five days a week on Saturdays. We have two runs that we, we do. The transfer station is closed at that point. You know, another thing is that we try to give people a chance, you know, I had somebody, I was looking for somebody that could do some painting and different things. Mainly, because we did a lot of this stuff for the transfer station ourselves and didn't do it with federal funds. It was almost all local funds.

George Levitsky

So, we used a lot of local labor local materials, you know, in the Tri-County Area. You know, we did things that way, but we had a young man that, that was living at the homeless shelter, and he needed some work, so we gave him a chance. And it took a while. But, you know what, here we're about six or seven years later, he's still working for us. And we've acquired some houses behind us where we have four employees that live there.

Robin Phillips

Wow.

George Levitsky

You know, that, that's really been something.

Robin Phillips

Do you have a partnership to do that? I mean, are you working with the housing group, or did you do that all on your own?

George Levitsky

Oh, yeah. We did it on our own. You know, there were some areas when I started, we probably had about a third of the land that we have now. We've required areas for parking. We've required, of course, the transfer station. We did work with the city whenever there was an area that they condemned a lot of building, they were looking at raising a lot of houses that were unoccupied. And they said, well, if you, if you help us pay half, we'll let you have the land. So, we're using that for good use. You know, throughout the years we've had more employees. So we need more places to park. We need more places. We've got more vehicles. The federal government and the state, we're making our vehicles a little longer, so we need place to change our transmissions and, you know, things that the rule didn't use to always do. And now we're doing a little more.

Robin Phillips

So, you do all your maintenance in-house.

George Levitsky

Mostly, you know, we do send some away when time allows or, or warranty workers, some of the bigger jobs. But we are doing more and more in-house, especially with the buildings that, that we're able to put up and use and getting the proper mechanics. That's one of the challenges, you know.

Robin Phillips

So how do you decide who ends up getting to live in your special housing?

George Levitsky

Well, it's people that need housing. I mean, I guess it's as simple as that. I mean, we really don't have a waiting, waiting list, per se. I mean, I do have one that, that is ready to go in, but we got some remodeling we have to do before we do that. So, it's kind of a first come first serve, if you wanna look at it that way. And, we've had several move out and moved on to that's kind of proud of that. He, a young man, he, he moved into a trailer court up the road by this gateway connector to the Connects the I 79 to downtown. About five or six years ago, changed our routes a little bit, and now he's buying the house. So, yeah. That's pretty neat. We had another one that, that moved out closer to his parents, you know, to help them out. Yeah. And then he, eventually, we got another job in the oil and gas. That's something that, the fracking and Marcella Shell has taken some of our employees, not a whole lot of 'em, but some of them, from this area.

Robin Phillips

So, do you partner with other organizations in your community to help put these things to together or to provide services?

George Levitsky

I don't know if we wanna say part. You know, when I see partnerships, we work very closely with the city and the county by the name Fairmont, Marion County Transit Authority, you know, the county commission, you know, respect of law to city. You know, when they need a bus to take their employees over to the park or across the bridge, you know, we help 'em with that when they bring in new city managers, to take them around. We do those type of things. You know, as far as partner with Mountain

Line, which is the transit agency to the north of us and center to the south of us, we go into their transfer stations where we can connect with them. And then this gateway that I was talking about too.

George Levitsky

Created two roundabouts. And it's about 1.3 miles. And, what we're also proud of is that they put three transfer stations, you know, three, places where people can catch the bus. Three on the inbound side, and two on the outbound side. And what made it nice with those roundabouts from the north Morgantown, their gray line service, because we lost Greyhound in the state and intercity bus money, they'll come into there four times a day. One is, they're going south to Clarksburg, and then North when they're going back up and they'll go to Pittsburgh, that gives bus service seven days a week to our citizens if they want to go. You know, it's not real convenient. Right. But they can use it, and it goes north and it'll go to Waynesburg. And then on to the Greyhound in Pittsburgh and the airport in Pittsburgh. And then we have something called I Rise 79, which comes up from Charleston every day. So, our citizens have that they could ride. And because Morgantown did that intercity bus, Greyhound came back to Morgantown, to the multi-modal there, and plus Megabus goes through there.

George Levitsky

East to DC every day and up to Pittsburgh. So, by what Morgantown did, it helped out a lot for all the citizens in the region.

Robin Phillips

So, do you have people that come from your system that connect with that? Do they go up there for a hub to get places? Is Pittsburgh the airport for your area?

George Levitsky

Pittsburgh is the main airport. You know, we do have smaller airports in Morgantown and in Clarksburg. But they have parking lots that they don't charge. And, you know, a lot of people do have cars. So, a lot of people drive to those, you know we tried to have a bus there on a daily basis, but we found we weren't bringing them into Fairmont. We were just keeping them in Harrison County. So, we figured we'd let Harrison County take care of that. It's more the going to the Pittsburgh airport for people. Yeah. That would catch the bus.

Robin Phillips

So, George, when you took on this job, how did you prepare for your first compliance review? What did you think it was?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, we're fortunate again, to have the Division of Public Transit in Charleston. We're a pass through. So, you know, I've been here 18 years, and just last year we had a review, and we came out, well, I'll say flying colors. It wasn't any finding. But a funny story is, we were supposed to have a review a couple years earlier, but I told them I was on the board, and I was the chairman. I said, I'm not gonna be there. So they went to center that year. The next time they came back, they didn't, I didn't get off the hook all together, but I did delay it a little bit. And, you know, and they're very good, going back to the division of Public Transit in Charleston. Every year, Dan Wagner, they hire.

George Levitsky

A consultant out of Virginia. And, he comes in and, we go right now, we have a 94-page workbook that we have to fill out. And, him and Cindy Fish, which is our director, she, I think she's the architect, as well. Yeah. And, they're gonna come up next month and go over it, make sure that we're doing everything for our 5311 operational funds that we get. And, so we're fortunate in that aspect.

Robin Phillips

She's fortunate to have a person who understands accounting. That's where, when, systems have problems, it's often with the accounting. And I know we just published a new financial management handbook, so when people aren't accountants and don't bring that to the table, we try to provide some of that information.

George Levitsky

And, you know, National RTAP has very good workbooks, I mean, I looked over 'em, and we suggest them to other people. So, you know, when you do have problems, you can look into those things and, they do help, help out a lot. You know, we were going through a lot of dispatchers there for a while, and we really used the RTAP dispatching handbook. You know, there was a little little CD with it, and it helped out a lot. It really did.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Well, we try to have materials that actually people like you can use and that you can help train your employees. We actually are just coming out, I think, in the next couple months with a new scheduling and dispatching handbook that got rewritten, you know, to update it for all the technology changes. A lot of the things that dispatchers do are so key. I mean, they, they're where people, when people call up and ask for a ride, it's, you have to find that special person. So, have you got any special tricks for that?

George Levitsky

Well, you're saying that here in West Virginia, we've been looking to getting some dispatch software. But we have eight small urbans and 10 rules throughout the state. In our rules, we're still better off using the Excel spreadsheets to manifest. It is not live, but it's something they get in the morning. And as it changes through the day, we use our two-way radio and tell people that they've canceled or, or we've added something to 'em. And then again, this day and age, with cell phones, you know, we tell 'em, when you, you're safely stopped, you please call in. So we do stuff in, in that way. The key to dispatching is to keep someone in there a good while. And I'm very fortunate that after we had that little spell where we were going through a lot of dispatchers, we've had one settle in, and he's been in there probably going on close to 10 years now. Wow. That works out very well. And then you have like my operations guy, he spells him through the day. And then we're training someone now, you know, to just to be that substitute when, when they are awesome.

Robin Phillips

Why do people, George, why do people stay at your business? Why do people stay working for you?

Robin Phillips

Had a few for a few years, I mean, 10 years with a dispatcher, another six years with the homeless guy who was doing painting. Like, really George. And it sounds like you're providing housing and what, what's going on over there.

George Levitsky

You know what? We have some changeover sometime.

Robin Phillips

You're talking about why people stay at Fairmont, Marion?

George Levitsky

Yeah. You know, we're, we're very fortunate where we are too, to have school bus drivers. The thing I was trying to think of is 25% generally of our workforce are vets. We're proud of that. And we work on Veterans Day, but we always send 'em and make sure they get a lunch that day. That's great. But, school bus drivers, things have changed throughout the year. You know, when I first started, we would use retired drivers that when I was coming in, but, you know, you're only going to get them for four or five years. And there was reason they retired, and then you have some that wanted to only do what they wanted to do, <laugh>.

George Levitsky

So, they didn't last very long. And now we have to have more full-time people. You know, there was a good while where I had a good many part-time that helped a lot on our compensation. But then having Mountain Line Transit to the north of us. And they're in the university city where we have Fairmont State University, which is more of a college. So, if they live in our county, I wouldn't go after 'em. But if they came to us for a job, we would be able to get them. And, you know, another place that we've been able to find them is our uniform people. You know, we used to have uniform people that would come in, Cintas, I believe it was.

George Levitsky

And we hired two drivers off of them. And then we just, instead of renting uniforms, we just made our own polos to go. And that was a big money saver, you know, that was something that I wanted to mention, in our area, we wear our polos. We would usually have something where we could do something a little different on Fridays that be red or breast cancer awareness, something coming up, Fairmont State football game, basketball game, WVU, they wear a shirt like that. Now too, you know, you notice postal workers, UPS, FedEx, they wear shorts, and our guys in the summer, we let 'em wear shorts as well, <laugh>. And, when I started, the guys would wear ties about six months out of the year.

George Levitsky

That was one of the first things we kind of got away from, and <laugh> went more with. We got into the polos real quick, and even t-shirts, you know, and we like to come up with t-shirts, you know, we had one one year, we had a driver while he was working paratransit, he went to the hospital. He says, I'm gonna check myself in. I'm not feeling very good. And he said, but you better come and get the bus. I gotta get my passenger <laugh>. So he went in the hospital, we went, got his bus, got the passenger to where they were going on time, and he passed away. We found out a little later that he had some stints earlier on. But he passed away. And then about a month after that, we had a maintenance guy in a bad car wreck.

And he's been handicapped since then, you know, in a wheelchair. So, we had two things happened real close together, and we made a shirt, and we had in memory.

George Levitsky

In the back, we, we Hader Strong, which was the name of the worker. And we've done that a few times. And it was back in that 2015/16 time.

Robin Phillips

September. So how, so how do you deal with your dialysis patients? Do you have a lot of dialysis happening in Fairmont, Marion?

George Levitsky

Right. We're very fortunate again, right off of I 79, we have a, a dialysis center. They do Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, two shifts. And we stay pretty busy, you know, you got that pickup in the morning around seven o'clock. You got that noontime pickup and take another batch, and then late in the day pick up.

Robin Phillips

Do you work with them to schedule to make sure that their patients that need your help are able to get their schedules?

George Levitsky

We try to work with them, you know, we do what we do, but it seems like cause of their change in management and what not, they're more worried about keeping their beds. I mean, they don't really need to fill to keep their bed, their, their chairs full, that they have to work with a whole lot. But what we tell 'em, if they're on the bus Monday, Wednesday, and Friday's better because Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, we generally don't do the Saturdays because they're not right within, right. Within everything. So, it works out pretty good. You know, we try to handle everybody we can. And sadly, you're only going to be in dialysis so long. I mean, 2005, my mother, she had to go to dialysis, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and my sister would take her, and I would take her home. So that was a way for me to be with my mom a few times a week. And about a year. And then she passed away back then.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Yeah. It's very serious. And yeah, you know, it's lucky that you're able to provide transportation to so many in your community,

George Levitsky

And everybody is touched with that. I mean, I have a cousin right now that we pick up in Farmington, which is about seven miles south or north of us, and get him and take him home, you know, and he's right on the bus line where he qualifies for paratransit. We're right in the heart of UMW area as well, and we're taking some, but I would think we could, we should have more. But again, a lot of people have cars.

Robin Phillips

Okay. The elephant in the room.

George Levitsky

Oh.

Robin Phillips

Covid.

George Levitsky

Yeah. It hit us all, you know, throughout the country.

Robin Phillips

But when did you guys get hit? When?

George Levitsky

Well, late March, you know, I think it was a Saturday night the governor was on TV, and I'm listening to him and I'm saying, you know what? We're gonna have to do something a little different. Cause we don't wanna just enable people to be out and about just because they want to be. So what we did, we, we shut down our 12 regular routes. We knew people that were going to work. We knew people that had to get to dialysis. We, we turned into sort of a taxi company in a sense. I split up my workforce. We had about 10 to 12 drivers, depending on sick vacation, whatever, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday this week, Tuesdays and Thursday next week. So, we had two different shifts like that. And what I did with the drivers, we made sure that they were paid right close to their 80 hours.

George Levitsky

So, we gave a little bit extra there. We had about seven of us that worked the five days a week. Saturday was, was closed all together. So that lasted for about four, two-week pace, a good two months. And then we opened up our regular routes again, because it got a little safer around here. You know, West Virginia, we've been pretty lucky. Marion County, you know, Morgantown has been hit pretty hard. We had a, had some more, but we opened up our regular routes. We kept Saturday closed, and then I was going every other Saturday, and I said, son, gone July 1st. We went every Saturday again, just to show, you know, that they need us. I didn't want 'em to say, well, they open or they not open. And we haven't, you know, knock on wood, we haven't had anybody that contacted us that they've contacted disease or none of our drivers have.

George Levitsky

But very first death that we had in West Virginia was just a couple blocks from our transit agency. And the second death was a passenger of ours. And we've only had, well, I'm not sure how many deaths we have. That's all we've had in Marion County so far. Those two. And then a third one that contacted the disease was, was, would be at our little bus stop here every day. So, you know, we were touched, you know, people would say, well, I don't really believe anything's happening. I think it's all fake news. I said, well, I know this is what happened. And then they would say, you know, I believe, you know, there's, someone died in a motorcycle house. And they said it was Covid. Well, I know there was a lot of people that things happened and they wanted to be Covid, and it's not so, I, everything you're saying, I'm just the opposite.

George Levitsky

But, so you know, and we're still dealing with it. The nice thing was that our governor said, you gotta wear a mask. And most people do, but you still have, the only thing bad he did. He said, if you can't breathe with them, you don't have to wear 'em. I said, oh my goodness. I mean, everybody's going to say that, but we'll turn people down if they're coughing and whatnot. We said, but give us a call. We'll get to you where you need to go. You know, just put one person in harm instead of all the passengers or everyone. And then, you know, keep the vehicle in, you know. And the other thing that it has done, we've got a fogger that we go through and get the buses on a daily basis. It was so hard to get disinfectants and things.

George Levitsky

So, what we've done is gone to one where we mix yourself where you turn 25 gallons into a hundred gallons, and we got a little automatic mixer that we use disinfectant wipes. You make those, or, you know, price gouging a little bit there. So, your cost of things and availability, Putting extra screens up for the protection of the drivers and your receptionist. And having masks. The state has sent us a lot of masks. We have somebody on our homeland security, he goes early on there were a lot more meetings than there are now, and things are changing. They're trying to figure things out.

Robin Phillips

And George, I'd love to hear a little bit more at some point about how you moved to coal mining to transit and what that transition was like. So, I'm really curious about that transition and what you already knew about finance management, as someone who's new.

Robin Phillips

To transit, because you were doing in, and you were an engineer, you were at for the coal miners. And then you ended up going into county public accounting. Public accounting.

Robin Phillips

And then you moved from there. So, I'd love to hear a little bit more about that and like how your career transitioned from the 20 years there to public accounting to transit.

George Levitsky

I worked in the mines with a guy that smoked Palm Mall cigarettes. Ooh. And hey, hey, no filter. And he would go through at least two packs a day and he would, back in the day, he'd fill up one of those 20 cup coffee machines, percolator type. And he would drink all that and maybe a little bit more. And if he would leave on Friday and on Monday when he'd come back, he'd just plug it in. Oh my gosh. That was some strong coffee. And it's a wonder, I don't have cancer because I was sitting in that room and there would be, I'd walk out the door sometime cause there was so much smoke. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Robin Phillips

And George, I was just saying I'd love to hear a little bit more about your transition from coal mining to public accounting to transit management and like your first day, like what actually happened, you walked in the door.

Robin Phillips

Like was it completely new to you? Did you have a sense of what you were going to be doing? I just love to hear a little bit more about it.

George Levitsky

Hey, hey, you know what else, I gotta add a little bit for Covid.

George Levitsky

Hey Robin. You know, another interesting story about Covid. If you notice I have a gray t-shirt. This is the Polo. And what I would do is I have two sets of these. I would usually wear a white T-shirt, but I have a red T-shirt and a gray that I do four days out of the week. And when I would go home because of Covid, my wife would make me take my clothes and put 'em in the washer every day. So that way I just would, would clean those two sets of clothes, which made it easier, what I was going to wear the next day. And every other day we'd wash 'em so we, we would be ready. So, that was one way that we were trying to keep up with that.

George Levitsky

And plus, we got one of those light savers. It sanitizes things so you can throw your keys, your wallet, your mask, your cloth mask in those to do that. So, it really changed your everyday routines and, you know, just to think about, going to a fitness, healthcare center, you're not doing that. You're not doing that anymore. You're not going to sporting events. I was a football official for a lot of years, 30 years in high school and over 20 in, in college. I would run the clock for football games and I would help with the clock and shot clock and basketball for our Fairmont State University. So those type of things are not there now.

George Levitsky

Restaurants, you have friends that, that run restaurants, stores. Are they gonna reopen? The world is just, who knows what it's gonna be like, and just like this Zoom, you know, it's gonna be used a lot more. You know, they found out that they can do it. I mean, my son works at a bank and he really doesn't have to go in. He can get more done by staying home and getting loans, loans closed and I mean, it's going to change.

Robin Phillips

For sure. So I think that what you brought up is that isolation and I mean, there's just things that you, it's hard to see how things are gonna go back to normal.

George Levitsky

The new normal.

Robin Phillips

Right. What is the new normal? So it sounds like you had to make a bunch of changes. So what do you see staying of the things that you've had to change, what do you see as being part of that new normal?

George Levitsky

Well, we sure hope that the conferences come back. I'm looking forward to the RTAP. I was ready to go, what was it? Charleston, South Carolina.

Robin Phillips

Oh, that's gonna be next fall.

George Levitsky

Yeah.

Robin Phillips

Next fall.

George Levitsky

We hope that that gets to be, and the CTAA, it was going to be in Kentucky. We were gonna get to go to Churchill Downs. That's one of my favorite things in those conferences is the big night out, you know? Yeah. We were talking about what the square dancing we did in Denver, you know, that's hard to beat. You know, we still remember those, those things.

Robin Phillips

Yeah.

George Levitsky

Well, that's something I surely hope comes back, but like you say, once a month we would have our association meetings. I really believe we're going to do, we're going to do more. We're going to do more Zoom stuff. A lot of my board meetings I think will be Zoom, and even like Rotary, we used to have a breakfast meeting every Wednesday we met at a restaurant now. They're changing the format. You're going to meet at the restaurant every other week, and in that other week, you're going to go out and maybe work at a homeless shelter or a food pantry or help a nonprofit.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Well, do you make your drivers wear masks?

George Levitsky

Oh, the drivers, yes. Because of the governor's requirement. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But if they're on the bus by themselves, we do not. They do have a shield. We have some clear shower curtains that they feel protected with, you know? We've gotten some extra shields. And I think now again, that's something that's going to change now when they order buses, they're gonna have some extra shields. Yeah. Extra protection. Yeah.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. So now I wanted to go, there's a couple of things. Well, what you have talked about this throughout our conversation is marketing and because I see the work that you do with Rotary and the community. And, then you were talking about how things have moved from what were you talking about? Radio. Newspaper. And now you're doing social media. And so are you on Twitter, George?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, we have a small presence on Twitter. We we're mainly on Facebook. I mean, again, in our area. The cell phone has been a great addition. You know, people used to miss the bus, they'd be in their house on the telephone, where's the bus, dag, oh there it is. It just passed. And now they can be on there with their cell phone and say, where's the bus? Okay, here it is. I'm getting on. So that helped. As far as that goes, we have our telephone number on our buses and that's the best way to get ahold of us. We do some trade with radio stations, advertising on the windows that we do where you can see through we do that where we do some trade.

George Levitsky

We have some telemarketing firms that like to use those. We make a little bit. I was just thinking, we used to have a local person that would make restaurant placemats, and we would have our little logo on there, and you have, have a free ride, but you know, he passes away and you don't have it anymore. Then, we had a lady and her husband that did our logos for us. You know, we would buy the shirts online, we take them over there, \$4, \$5, put 'em on hats, put 'em on jackets, you know, made it real nice. And you were doing something locally. Her husband dies. She quits doing it. But, you know, luckily we're able to go to a disability center and they're doing it for us locally.

George Levitsky

You have 4 Imprint and things like that. Yeah. That can make a lot of things. Course, you have some local, we have some local ones that can do t-shirt. Matter of fact, I had a part-time driver that can make t-shirts and, you know, we'd make a t-shirt for the 4th of July. We made one with our flag on it, our names on it. Another thing just to help out, I got one driver. We got where you can make numbers. You know how you have to put final numbers on your buses, 200, whatever they are. And we used to have to wait a while to get 'em made. We gave it to the bus company. Now we do it to the bus company when we know far enough in advance what we're going to name 'em.

George Levitsky

But you know, we do two four-inch numbers on the front and back, and three-inch on the sides, and then we do an inch on the license plate in the front. So I've got a driver that can do that. You know, he actually lives in one of the houses here, and he can keep the equipment in the house <laugh>. So, you know, we do that and we can make signs, but there's a lot of local places that it's more cost efficient to go to them. And plus it puts some money back out in the community. And because of the levy we like, we like to keep the local businesses, you know, strong.

Robin Phillips

So, George, when we started talking about your really broad spectrum of career things, what got you to apply for this job?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, working in the coal mines, I worked for the company. So, I did a lot of drafting. I started out, we did surveying. We did surveying in the mine. There would be a two-man crew sometime, a three-man crew. It helped me for this job, reaching back to that, I had like three guys underneath me that did the survey and once I moved up to draftsman, and then they called the engineering at the portals. And I would do all the mapping and the outside survey and plotting things. So that gave me a sense of bossing other individuals, <laugh>, and working for a big company.

Robin Phillips

Siblings George? Do you have siblings?

George Levitsky

I have three sisters. I have one younger and two older.

Robin Phillips

Did you get any practice bossing them around?

George Levitsky

You know, they bossed me around a good bit early on. Cause my older sisters and then my younger sister, a little bit, you know, she was three years younger, so, not a whole lot of bossing tell you the truth with that, you know, I had some younger cousins, so I got my license first. So I took them around and you know, back in the day you didn't have a whole lot of cars. So, you know, we would ride with other people. I mean, I was passenger a heck of a lot. And matter of fact, when I was in high school, our school closed down from mine, sub science. I was a junior. We went home for Thanksgiving holiday. And the gym looked like an ocean. So we had to close our school, and we went seven miles here to Fairmont, from Farmington to Fairmont. I grew up in Farmington, where the mine explosion was. And, at noon, there were two schools in this building, same time, Farmington and Fairmont for one hour.

Robin Phillips

Oh, they didn't put you together? They had you separate?

George Levitsky

We were separate, but we were together for an hour. <laugh>. So, but anyhow, so we did that. So, we had that, so that I was on the bus for a while there, and then when I got my license.

Robin Phillips

We were just talking about how you were boss and people around where you got your leadership chops.

George Levitsky

Yeah. And hey, you know what, and I would take my girlfriend. She would go to school with me. So, I did bus a couple of girlfriends to school in Fairmont, seven miles away. Come to think of it when I was in high school. So that was good. Before I went to work for my family, my mom, we had the furniture store. Grocery store. So, I learned there the skills that it took for a self-proprietor, you know. Yeah. Things you had to do. I mean, we would sweep the blacktop pavement, parking lot every day if it needed it or not. It just showed you there was something to do, be consistent with what you do, be reliable, you know, reliable with something else that was taught from, from those early ages.

George Levitsky

And then being in the accounting, well before though, when I, the handwriting was on the wall, the mines were gonna close. I, I had one year of schooling at Fairmont State in a county. And I always tried to become a professional engineer, but there were never hardly any classes. I took a course in surveying at WVU, and I, I got it, but my wife wanted to go to school to become a teacher. So when I got the Fairmont

State Book, I saw that I could go to class in the evenings and get my business degree. So it took me three years to get my second year of my associate degree in business. So, I learned from there, you know, how you would travel and spend your time at work and make it to school all the time. You know, not miss, you would go to school with being a non-traditional student with some students that were regular students at night having night classes. And some instructors would say, if you're here at the end of the class, you get extra credit. We would, we would still have people leave at the break. Now, that's the easiest credit you could get just by being there. And they say showing up.

Robin Phillips

Showing up is 90%.

George Levitsky

And that's how we would do that. I would do that. So that's how I got my associate degree in business. And then right after that, I found out there was a degree completion program from Alderson Broads College, which was in Philippi, about 20 miles south of me towards Clarksburg. And they came to Fairmont. The instructor would come to Fairmont. So, another three years. I got my other two years. So that's how I got my bachelor degrees and organizational management and business. So there you go. And that, so I thought that was, you know, was gonna protect my job with consultants. Then I got laid off. And so when I was applying for jobs, I didn't have any experience for my age in accounting, but I did finally get a job with a local accountant and, you know, you did what you had to do, you know, because the coal mines was pretty good paying jobs.

George Levitsky

And you, you go to a lot less. I was, I was putting the son through college. The only good thing about it putting my son through college is I got more federal aid. Cause I wasn't making quite as much. And, by the time he graduated in five or six years, I mean, I had two sons who were seven years apart. So we, my wife and I, we were putting kids to school for 12 years. She took a little leave of absence to, to the younger son for about five years when he was growing up. And, she went back to work and she never did get in teaching. She actually got her old job, the person that took her place was retired, so she just got hit back. So that worked out pretty good. But as far as getting me ready, you know, it was just dealing with people. And by being in the coal mines, I was out of the county and I couldn't do things. And that's what made me want to be more involved in the community. And I'm very fortunate that I have a seven-member board, you know?

Robin Phillips

How do you use the board? I mean, how do they really charge up your system?

George Levitsky

Listen, I said simple. We had only five members, and they're on a three-year. Two of them from the city are appointed and two of 'em from the county. And somehow one of 'em joint appointed, whoever came up with that, you know, when they first, it was, it was the amount of money that, the amount of money they would give, you know, when we were in 1973. But by 1988, especially when we got the levy, we didn't get money directly from them. It was, it was all from the levy. So, we have that and we have monthly means. And with the Covid, you know, we didn't have two meetings and or our board, we didn't try to Zoom. So now we social distance and just having five, we can do it in the room and spread people out. And that's been working pretty good. But, it's good to have the funding that we have. It makes it a

lot easier to manage when you're not scraping for money or having to look for it. But we're always looking for ways to do things better.

Robin Phillips

So, I know that you also have worked a lot, you've negotiated with LogistiCare and the state and trying to work with people in your community that are on Medicaid, but also, and you know about the people who are not on Medicaid, but they can't afford to drive themselves around. They're not able to. So how do you work with medical transportation? NEMT in your community?

George Levitsky

A lot of our dialysis patients are not Medicaid. Medicare, yeah. Medicaid, more Medicare. But our fares are so low, you know, 75 cents one way. Most of 'em can afford that. Now, if somebody can't afford it, we're going to help them with some tickets, or whatnot. You know, right now our state has got a lot of money for the opioid addiction. So, we're in a process right now of working.

Robin Phillips

Do you have a treatment facility in your community?

George Levitsky

You know, by being on the I 79 quarter to the North and South lot in Morgantown, lot in Clarkfield. And then we do have some facilities here as well. You know, people want to go to certain places and maybe they go to different places. A lot of the people that are hooked on these things, they don't go at times or no shows, which, that's something like, with LogisticCare, they never paid us, you know, they contracted with us to go pick 'em up, but if they don't show up, they're not allowed to pay, as they say. So that's a hard pill to swallow where, you know, we're, we're doing a lot of things. We just like for 'em to call and tell us they're not going to go. And, you know, we'll bring people in early sometime, but that's what the DHHR in the state is trying to do.

George Levitsky

You know, maybe pay us a little bit for this or that, and that people would call people that are falling through the cracks. They're trying to help 'em. And we're trying to work with those people, to get to where they need to go. You know, MTM is the one we had our first three-year contract LogisticCare, got the second three-year contract, and we're going into our third. And LogistiCare got renewed here recently. That was the thing back in the day. DHHR didn't really listen to public transit a whole lot when they were making these contracts. Yet we were the ones doing the work, but they would make the contracts, and that's where they, you know, didn't think it was a big thing about no shows.

Robin Phillips

If it was a medical appointment, they would.

George Levitsky

Right? But now, DHHR is finally starting to listen to us a little bit, but the Covid thing is making it so we've gotta do stuff long distance and that's making it hard. And plus doctor's offices, there's a lot of consulting offices. They're doing Zoom now. Instead of you taking them there. So, that's changed. You know, going back to the Covid, you know, we're down, we were down about 15% for the fiscal year, cause of Covid in

our ridership, but we were only down about 11% in the miles that we drove. So that's, whoa. So, you know, that shows that we still had to drive a good bit now. And as far as our ridership so far, we're only back to about 50%. So, who knows what's going to happen as far as that goes. We're offering the rides now for people to, to be ready to get back on and doctor's offices and things being open that people would go to. And, you know, school.

George Levitsky

I mean, our school bus drivers in the area are going to have a real rough time trying to social distance, trying to have enough people to drive. You know, they're offering two thirds pay if they don't wanna drive, you know, and you can hear, you know, teachers, you can go to school, you don't have to go to school. How in the heck can you say things like that? So that's the learning curve that they're having. How, how are they going to be able to do this? And then, you know, in our area, they are gonna try to have high school football, but only the immediate family of the players are gonna be able to go. So, we'll see.

Robin Phillips

Are they gonna televise it? I mean, how are they gonna make that something for the community?

George Levitsky

Well, it's not gonna be televised, but it'll be on the radio. You know, that's mainly how we've had high school football for years anyhow, is radio. And luckily we do still have a local radio station that we actually got a couple that, that do the games.

Robin Phillips

Well. That's great. So what's your next big thing? What's your vision for Fairmont Marion Transit?

George Levitsky

Our fuel tanks are 30 years old. So insurance companies, they do not wanna insure 'em when they're at that old. Now, luckily, we haven't had any problems with them. They're in ground tanks. So we're in the process of doing that, you know, and that's a few hundred thousand dollars. We've been saving up for this type of thing, so we're gonna be real fortunate to do some local things. You know, that's another thing, like with our 5311 operating funds, we mainly just use our compensation. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that's about all we really get. We get about \$525,000 for our 5311. So, it makes it a little easy, procurement-wise, where we don't have to federal procurement come through all those hoops. Yeah. But the other thing is, like I was saying earlier too, we wanna put some more storage areas, some garages where we're looking at doing that. Just upgrading cameras, putting some new flooring down. I mean, things don't last, you know, 10 years, you have to do a lot of renovation, paint, so the big things are the tanks and another, storage building garage type thing.

Robin Phillips

Cool. Well, you were talking about cameras, you're talking about security cameras in your security facility.

George Levitsky

Security. You know, again, that was one of the best improvements in the buses in the rural areas where we were able to put, you know, we started out with like three cameras. We got about five cameras. Now

we don't do a live, but we can go in and look at 'em when we need to. A lot of times the drivers will come and say, you know, so-and-so's probably gonna call you because she fell out of the seat, or whatever. And a lot of times they tell us their themselves, because our passengers are so appreciative of the service. They don't call us, but we see, you know, what happens. And maybe, you know, that's, that's our best training, you know, for watching drivers when they're tying down wheelchairs, you know, we use the cameras, because if you're sitting in the bus with them, they might not, they might go the extra mile to, to do stuff, but, but when the camera's running, we can watch 'em in any time. So that's been a big help. The cameras in our buses.

Robin Phillips

What do you see when you're thinking about training your drivers? What kind of resources do you use to train your drivers?

George Levitsky

Again, because of the Division of Public Transit, we are very up on things like that, to get our 5311 funding, we have to give so much training each year. And they also offer so much a year. You know, we do things, you know, customer service, first aid every other year, PASS training, you know, passenger sensitivity. The state trained two of our employees, so we can give the training. And then I'm actually on our local senior center board. And we'll help train them if they need it. I've got a driver trained to do wheelchair lifts, for other areas in the community. And sometimes even other agencies, if they're having some traumas, they'll come to us or where we go to them just for another eye to see if we can do something a little different, just to solidify what someone's saying. So, training, you know, it's getting harder too, because of the drugs in the area and the job outlook. It's hard to find jobs and who knows what jobs are going to be out there. And right now a lot of drive-throughs, so you don't need as many waitresses.

Robin Phillips

Oh yeah. With the Covid.

George Levitsky

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You know, it is a shame, you know, as we're talking, everything kind of ties back to Covid what's going to happen. And it is going to be something. I mean, I think the masks may be something that is going to last. And especially we have the second largest fair in West Virginia up to around about eight miles where we go four times a day in West Virginia. And, you know, they weren't able to have it. I saw there were some conferences they were gonna try to do Zoom. I was gonna try to take a take one in just to see what it was like, but I didn't, I didn't get a not yet register in time. And I'm hoping that we, we get to have live ones with RTAP and CTAA, you know, you get to see your friends, but, you know, it's a little scary staying in a hotel.

Robin Phillips

We're hoping by next October that we'll be having our RIBTC, the Rural Intercity Bus Transportation Conference down in Charleston.

George Levitsky

Yeah. You know, I might have to come with an RV or something, you know? Yeah. Park out or find an RV park or something and pull behind. Yep. An electric vehicle or something.

Robin Phillips

You could bring your wife.

George Levitsky

Yeah. I think she may come to this cause we do have a niece in the area. That was another reason why we really wanted, being 20 years in the coal mines and then in a small business in public accounting. But, you know, as you go to these conferences, the RTAP or the CTAA, you know, there's good people in public transit, you know, I've never felt slighted being from West Virginia going to these places, you know, when I was in RTAP, different, other managers or state, state people went to the program while I was there and represented about 24 states. I remember Louie Friend up in Alaska, when he did his presentation, he put the state of Alaska, and he said, my service area is like my colleague from West Virginia.

George Levitsky

The size of their state is the area that I cover. And then he had that on there. And the reason he said that is because his son-in-law was from Kingwood, West Virginia, just down the road about 30 miles, and then another one from, from Washington State. Her parents were from Summersville, West Virginia, you know, and I would always bring a newspaper to show 'em how I did my advertising. And I actually gave the newspaper to her dad. What happened was they shut travel down, so he wasn't allowed to come anymore. Yeah. You know, it was always neat. He would bring Native fruits and vegetables to share with us, and his wife would make a little scrubbing pad.

Robin Phillips

That was good. I like that.

George Levitsky

That was being on the review board, you know, and talking about training, we're always looking, see what RTAP offers, or, you know, LogistiCare is real good about offering certain training. And, you know, we got to background checks on people, and sometimes they go overboard on how much training we have to have, but we just roll with it and do what we need to do.

Robin Phillips

So, is there anything that I haven't asked you? It sounds like you love the area that you're in and that you grew up in the area. So, if you wanna talk a little bit about why you stay in the area?

George Levitsky

Well, Fairmont, West Virginia, I was born in Farmington, West Virginia. We're about seven miles south. We still go through there with our buses. My uncle actually was the chairman of the Board of the Transit Authority back in 1974. His vice chairman, after my uncle served about 10 years. And, you know, when I worked in the mines, I drove right by here every, every day. And I would see, you know, the bus wash. And, I knew my uncle, cause I worked for him when I was younger, how he was on cleaning vehicles, with the carpet trucks and making them clean. I have a lot of family from my mother's side here. You know, I had 20 cousins and we're still pretty close.

George Levitsky

This Covid thing is, has been tough. What's nice, I think the cost of living's pretty good. Very fortunate to have, have this job. You know? I was one of several candidates to apply, and I was able to be the winning candidate. And I really hope they feel they made a good choice. I try to represent the transit authority all the time, things we do. And been able to go to a lot of places. One of the things I always wanted, I'm sure a lot of young boys wanted to be pro athletes, you know, and sign autographs. So, I signed paychecks, you know, and <laugh> other checks. Although, you know, I signed several checks a month, and I always be being in the minds, you know, I always wanted to have a company vehicle.

George Levitsky

So, I'm able to drive vehicles for the Transit Authority and the board, real good to me on that. Cause after we had a young man that lived outside the service area, and I would go in the mornings to pick him up, just to bring him into town. And he would work and he would be able to catch a school bus home sometime. And that was something that we would do it, you know, things changed over the years here at the Transit. We used to have a lot more kids, you know, our workforce was younger then, so we would have times when the kids you know, we'd have 10 kids here, during the day and have lunch for 'em and have 'em ride the bus.

George Levitsky

And, a lot of 'em would bring their kids to work with them in the summertime. And, so, you know, the workforce has changed. Matter of fact, I was just looking through a book, you know, kind of thinking about some of the stuff for here. And there's two of 'em at workforce now. A couple in their twenties, early and late twenties. The one that I talked to that lived in one of our apartments, and guy had the trailer, and now he's getting the house his grandpa works for. And actually, his grandpa's retired and then came back and he works at our transfer station.

Robin Phillips

This like Hotel California?

George Levitsky

Well, one of the drivers, his wife, he was actually a school bus driver, and he would come to work for us, during his break during the day. And then finally he retired from there. And now he's working for us full-time, and his wife is working at a transfer station.

Robin Phillips

It sounds like you recycle people a lot.

George Levitsky

Well, hey, you tried to, because they already know the job and you don't have to train them. And, you hope that you could do that. It just, they're getting, we're running out of those people. Because you're getting those ones for five years and they're not around anymore. But I'm fortunate to live on the Tug River. You know, I have a pontoon boat that we use a lot of. I live three miles from here, which is a nice, easy trip. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, I come in on Saturdays and I come in on Sunday just to make sure, you know, nothing's going wrong. Pick up the newspaper and see how things are going. You

know, we have a place out back that once we remodeled in 2008, this building was built in 1980 and we remodeled it.

George Levitsky

We had a 10,000- foot building, added another 3,300. But a vehicle ran through a brick wall. Guy was pretty loaded. Landed on the inside and broke through the wall. And then, before we could fix it, another one ran through. So, I put some pollards and hope to get a picture of that. But haven't had any problems lately. And to tell you the truth, we did have someone else hit the wall, but didn't hurt it. And, then here, our transfer station been about five years, and we had somebody hit one of our light poles. Luckily, insurance paid for that. And then the police said, you know, somebody ran, do you have your cameras? Someone hit your building? And I knew it couldn't have been going very fast. Cause all it did is bent the downspout and hit a fiberglass pillar, which it would've broken if it was going.

George Levitsky

But what we found out with the camera, we couldn't see the license plate real good. But with the camera, we have an assisted living building right by, that's why. Another reason we put our transfer station where we did, we used to have to go in this assisted living, with every one of our routes and turn around. And it was hard a lot of times. So we built a sidewalk over to that system. Now they come to us unless they really can, and then we do. But, but they, someone was throwing their trash in the dumpster, and their truck started drifting back and hit our building.

Robin Phillips

That's how you got there.

George Levitsky

So that's why there wasn't a lot of damage. So again, staying in this area.

Robin Phillips

I mean, sounds like you are the community.

George Levitsky

Well, my wife and son's girlfriend, they call me Mr. Marion County, but, I mean, I'm not that far. You know, the older I get, I get a little forgetful, things like that. But, a lot of good memories, a lot of good people that we know.

Robin Phillips

Hey, well, George, you've really made a big difference. And I mean, the things that you've talked about, and I love that you're wearing your shirt and that you've created, if people can see your Fairmont Marion logo and you know, this is what it's about. And there seems like there's a lot of pride, not just in you because you've created and nurtured so much, but in your community with your system, which is really great. And I think that we've pretty much covered everything. The only thing, the one thing I was thinking is, did you guys get any CARES money?

George Levitsky

Well, you know, the state of West Virginia got 46 million for transit. 23 went to the eight urban areas in 23 has come to our rurals. But the way, the way they're giving it to us is when we do our 5311 match, they're going to cover the match for a full calendar year. It started in March.

Robin Phillips

So, they're giving you the same allocation, but yeah. You just don't have to match any of it.

George Levitsky

Right. And they're spreading the money out where the urban areas kind of got their direct us being a pass. We're getting it from the state, the state's holding onto the money. And that's the way West Virginia decided to do it. So that has helped out a lot. That loosens up some of my local funding to do some other things.

Robin Phillips

Well, what are you gonna do with it?

George Levitsky

Well, again, it's gonna loosen up some of our local funding to help with the tanks.

Robin Phillips

Yeah. Right. You said that you were gonna do the tanks and you were looking at some other improvements. The billing.

George Levitsky

Yeah. Yeah. And the things that we're doing, but it's not the CARES money. The CARES money is actually going right to compensation and helping to pay for those extra hours.

Robin Phillips

Extra hours.

George Levitsky

Hours. So, I mean, the hours haven't been a whole lot different because we're back to our regular schedule. Right?

Robin Phillips

Right.

George Levitsky

We've lost some hours because we would bring somebody in on Sunday to take some people at church and we're not having that. We would take 'em from a nursing home.

Robin Phillips

Right.

George Levitsky

Church would pay us to do that.

Robin Phillips

Well, that's great. Well, maybe next year you'll be able to do that again. I mean, we hope that we can get this under control and that the resources that you guys are bringing to the table can really be used to help people come together. I personally can't imagine you as an accountant, because there wouldn't be enough talking,

George Levitsky

Well, hey, you know, I got to talk a lot. You know, people would come in and do their taxes, and I would do stuff after hours, you know, to make ends meet. I would do stuff for my cousin that had a carpet store. After that, I helped a jewelry store. I would do his monthly reconciliation just to give another look at their bank books and make sure nobody's kind of getting some money off a fruit, a produce store. They were in bankruptcy, you know, they're in bankruptcy. And the federal government makes some fill out these reports. Somebody was charging 'em a thousand, \$2,000 a month. I said, my gracious, how are you gonna get outta bankruptcy when you have to fill? So I would go and help them fill out those reports for just a couple hundred dollars or whatever.

George Levitsky

So I was helping them get through that. I got to talk cause I was in a professional building where I got to, there was the architect's office and lawyer's office and insurance agents and those type of things. And, that's how I got on the board of the credit union. I was in line and I started talking to this lady behind me, and she was on the board when they were looking for somebody. Next thing you know, I'm on the

Robin Phillips

Board.

George Levitsky

You gotta

Robin Phillips

Talk. So, George, yeah. So George, if you were gonna tell someone about RTAP and the resources at RTAP, what would you tell them to go look for?

George Levitsky

Well, I mean, you know, go on the website. You know, there's, there's all types of training that, that can help you. There's ways to, you know, if you, you need to know about procurement. And then the other thing is, you know, there's ways to get ahold of them and find out if there are some training in the pipeline, or, hey, we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Maybe RTAP knows of other training that's out there that they could, direct you towards. But, but RTAP is a great organization and the review board members keeps things relevant. And, Robin is great. And Hey, RTAP, what can you say? Oh, and, you know, and we hope that the conference gets to happen next year.

Robin Phillips

Yes. Yes. Well, thank you so much, George. And, when this comes out, we'll make sure you know about it. And we really appreciate you spending this time. Now, you are an expert. You've got your PhD in podcasting.