



Jobs Rides driver Jason Hess shuttles low-income workers to their jobs. (Photo: Steve Dinnen)

Nonprofit Job Rides helps workers get to work

BY STEVE DINNEN

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Here's how a for-profit, nonprofit relationship typically works: The for-profit company makes money and then donates some of its earnings to a nonprofit it wishes to support. The for-profit gets a tax break, while the nonprofit gets financial support.

And here's the way that relationship got upended in the world of Bill Raine: His for-profit business set up a side business that eventually spun off as its own nonprofit entity. Then he sold his for-profit business so he could devote his time, his talents and a considerable amount of his resources to operating the nonprofit, which serves the for-profit's efforts to help hundreds of men and women get to work and get back on their feet financially.

Raine's nonprofit venture is [Job Rides](#). It provides transportation to and from factories and offices all over Greater Des Moines, at all hours, for people who don't have a car or access to one. They're often living in a shelter, rehabbing from drug or alcohol abuse, or in some sort of work release program. (The Iowa Correctional Center at Fort Des Moines is a popular pickup spot.) In most cases, the place where they live or the place where they work aren't located on bus lines, or the hours of their shifts don't match DART's schedules.

"We're 24-7," said Raine — nights, weekends, rain or shine.

Job Rides builds on his efforts to help the employers his original for-profit recruiting firm worked with. Raine Recruiting found workers for factories but often discovered that their tenure was cut short because they lacked access to reliable transportation.

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So Raine Recruiting got a van and started hauling workers around. Then it got another, and another, and the business grew enough that Raine carved it out of the employment agency and set up a nonprofit. And now that nonprofit has taken control of Raine's life: He's just closed on the sale of Raine Recruiting, so he can devote all his energies to Job Rides, its seven vans and its hundreds of daily commuters. Raine estimates that Job Rides customers are averaging \$16 an hour in pay.

One of those customers, David Johnston, was way down on his luck and living in a men's shelter when he got a job offer at a local manufacturing plant. He had no way to get to and from their plant, however — until Job Rides came along.

"This van was the biggest thing," he said the other day, as he hopped out of a van that brought him home from a long day at work.

Immigrants have tapped into Job Rides, too. Raine recalled that in late 2022 an immigration service sent him 65 Afghans. Most had worked on HVAC systems (heating, ventilating and air conditioning) at a U.S. Army base in Afghanistan, so they had plenty of desirable skills. Job Rides delivered every one of them to their workplaces every day, and within months, they all had earned enough money to buy their own cars and say farewell to the nonprofit.

Raine had good success finding workers, and factories were eager to hire his recruits. Nearly all of the Job Rides passengers are heading to "second-chance employers," including businesses that hire people with criminal records.

Job Rides pays its drivers but otherwise relies on volunteers. That includes Raine, who has plowed his own money into the enterprise and works countless hours on his new life mission. He estimates the nonprofit's 2024 budget is around \$500,000, including a big chunk of change for fuel. Most of the operating expenses are covered by riders, who each pay \$50 a week for door-to-door service.

Raine is pondering a stronger financial strategy, maybe something that will actually earn him a small amount of money versus the zero dollars he currently receives.

He's always thinking about how the model could work in other Iowa cities, as well. There are second-chance employers across the state, so he just hopes to match them up with second-chance workers.