

## Driver starts alternative taxi service

Written by MARK JAEGER

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### When Port stopped offering rides as budget move, opportunity opened for private business venture

When opportunity knocks, you might as well open the door.

That was the rationale of Brian Maher, who started Hometown Taxi Service after learning that the City of Port Washington was discontinuing its TransPort taxi service.

The city was the only community in Ozaukee County to support its own taxi service. Shared rides are now available through the county's shared-ride program, which is managed by Specialized Transport Service.



BRIAN MAHER HAS has been delivering passengers with his Hometown Taxi Service since the start of the month.

Photo by Mark Jaeger

Maher was intimately aware of the city's cost-cutting decision to drop the TransPort program, having driven for the shared-ride service full-time for the past five years.

"Once the word got out that the city was eliminating the service, I probably got calls from at least 100 people saying I should start my own taxi," Maher said.

"It is actually something I had been thinking about for a number of years."

At this time, his fleet is a single 2008 Chrysler Town & Country van.

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As demand grows, probably as soon as March, Maher hopes to add a car, and eventually another van. He has no plans to add a handicapped-accessible vehicle, however, because of the high cost.

Three former coworkers at TransPort have expressed interest in driving for the new taxi business, including Maher's father Richard, who was a dispatcher with the city taxi service for 13 years.

"Right now I am a one-man operation. I handle my own dispatching with a wireless headset, sometimes while I am on the road. It is a lot safer than using a CB and having to grab a mic when you are driving," Maher said.

When he began considering starting the taxi business, Maher approached the state Department of Motor Vehicles, and was told as long as he is transporting fewer than 16 passengers at a time, no special licensing is required.

Maher does have a commercial driver's license, because he is a part-time school bus driver.

So far, most of his passengers have been senior citizens and people with handicaps who have a difficult time getting around on their own.

"I do what I can to help all of my passengers, even if it means getting out of the van to carry their groceries into their homes," Maher said.

Although only on the road since Jan. 2, he said he has been very busy.

"People know I am here. A lot of them notice me driving around town in the van," Maher said.

"I have already gotten a lot of calls from business owners in Port, saying how happy they are that I am here. The number of calls seems to be growing every day."

Rates are comparable to those the previous service charged for one-way, in-town rides.

"We charge 25 cents more — \$4 for adults, and \$3.25 for seniors, students and the disabled," Maher said.

Children aged 3 and younger ride free with an adult.

Rides outside of Port are an additional \$1.25 per mile.

Fares on the county-supported service range from \$2.50 to \$6.75, depending on the distance traveled. There are no preferences given to trip within a community.

The Hometown Taxi runs Mondays through Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Rides can be arranged by calling (262) 339-6388.

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