

## **TRANSIT CONNECT WINNER: CIRCLE TAIL, INC.**

Jen Kiblinger's life has gone to the dogs – and she couldn't be happier.

As vice president of Circle Tail, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Pleasant Plain, Ohio, that provides high-quality assistance dogs to people with mobility, hearing, neurological and psychiatric disabilities, Kiblinger spends much of her time transporting cargos of active canines. Owning a Ford Transit Connect, she said, will ease many of the complexities the group faces on a daily basis.

Circle Tail is one of five grand prize winners in Ford's "Connect with Connect" contest. Winners will receive a customized Transit Connect, the versatile new van that debuts in February 2009 at the Chicago Auto Show. With a cargo capacity of 143 cubic feet, compact maneuverability and efficient 19 mpg city and 24 mpg highway, it's the perfect vehicle for small businesses on the go.

For Circle Tail, the Transit Connect is ideal. The dogs, which travel in airline-type crating, are a bulky – but valuable – cargo that can be a unique challenge to load. With Transit Connect's 180-degree rear doors and low-load deck, that challenge is lessened considerably.

"We have about 40 dogs in training at any one time, and it seems like we're always unloading and loading the dogs –along with all the supplies that go with them – collars, leashes, toys, dog food, all that," said Kiblinger, who will soon take over as board president. "We can fit about four or five dogs, usually, and there's really so much to carry."

Circle Tail, Inc., founded in 1997 by Marlys Staley, also provides dog adoptions, obedience training and boarding. It's one of those rare entities that benefits both people and animals, said Kiblinger.

"There's never been a time when I didn't love animals," she said. "And Circle Tail offers the best of both worlds – helping animals while helping people, too. We provide assistance dogs at no cost to the individual, and we offer services to strengthen the human-canine bond so dogs are more likely to stay with their families instead of being given up."

The organization works with area prisons on dog training. Inmates, schooled by Circle Tail in dog training, learn accountability and responsibility, and the dogs thrive on the extra attention. "Some of the stories you hear from the prisons are amazing," said Kiblinger. "This really helps normalize the inmates' lives; they do great with the dogs."

But all those trips back and forth in the group's old minivan have taken their toll. The Transit Connect, said Kiblinger, is a perfect solution – from its size to its maneuverability.

"This is wonderful," she said. "We couldn't believe that we'd actually won!"

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### **About Ford Motor Company**

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