Helping Those in Need To Get Where They are Going

Volunteer Driving with the Volunteer Center Transportation Program

Volunteer 6.15.12

For most people, getting to a medical or dental appointment, the grocery store, or bank is as simple as jumping in the car or onto the local bus. But, for some in the community, it is impossible due to a disability, declining health, or the rigors of aging.

For over 40 years, the Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County Transportation Program has served to address the needs of ambulatory seniors and the disabled by offering free rides throughout the county.

The program matches volunteer drivers with seniors (55 and over) and disabled individuals for essential trips to medical appointments, grocery stories, pharmacies, and banks. Rides are provided throughout Santa Cruz County including Watsonville, San Lorenzo Valley, Scotts Valley, and Santa Cruz.

"It is one of the founding programs of our organization and has been 100% volunteer run since it's inception. All drivers and phone dispatchers are community volunteers," states Volunteer Center Executive Director Karen Delaney.

"This year we expect to provide over 5,500 rides throughout the county. We are proud that we have maintained a track record of filling 97% of all ride requests but we urgently need more volunteer drivers and dispatchers for the Watsonville office to maintain this level of service." states Watsonville Transportation Coordinator Rachel Glynn.

Drivers can choose to make as little as one trip a month, or they can drive as often as they wish. They choose their own hours and destinations. All rides happen on weekdays during business hours and drivers receive a small mileage reimbursement. The program attracts an eclectic mix of people including retirees, working individuals, stay-at-home parents, and college students.

"Every day, rain or shine, volunteer drivers show up on doorsteps throughout the county to provide a ride and a helping

Fairfax Lomonosoff working a shift at the transportation dispatch desk. She has served as a lead volunteer with the Transportation Program for more than 15 years.

hand. It is the perfect example of a simple deed that has a huge impact," states Delaney. "Something as easy as giving someone a ride can mean the difference between living at home or being moved to assisted living. Individuals are able to maintain independence, arrive safely at critical appointments, reconnect with the community, and deter feelings of isolation by getting outside the home."

Geneva, an 83 year-old resident of Watsonville agrees, "The Transportation Program is a lifesaver. I cannot see, therefore I cannot drive, and I have no idea how I would complete the things I need to do without the program. My only other option is to take a cab but that costs at least $40 every time I need to go to the doctor and I can't afford that."

"All the volunteer drivers have been so kind to me. I don't know what else to say besides, it's a lifesaver," said Geneva.

Geneva is not alone in her struggles with transportation. Each year, more than one million Americans aged 70 and older stop driving and become dependent on others to meet their transportation needs. At the 2005 White House Conference on Aging, mobility was ranked the third highest issue for older people—ahead of Social Security and Medicare.

"Clearly as our population continues to age, demand for this service has grown. We've always been fortunate to have volunteers step up to meet the need and we look forward to welcoming in a new cadre of program supporters to sustain our efforts ", states Glynn.

The transportation phone lines are open Monday through Thursday 9-3, Friday 9-1pm

Volunteer Requirements: Volunteers must have a reliable car, proof of insurance and a clean driving record. ∎

• • •

For More information or To Get Involved: Contact Rachel Glynn at 722-6708 or wats@scvolunteercenter.org