Golden Years

Need a Ride? You Have Options
By Deborah Jeanne Sergeant

Half of non-drivers who are 65 and older say they stay home because they lack transportation options, according to www.seniortransit.org. This means that they may become more and more isolated, not buy fresh groceries as often as they need them and miss medical appointments.

But groups in the Rochester area are working to change this, especially for older adults without public transportation and for people who struggle to afford paying for transportation. Lifespan’s Mary Rose McBride said that lack of transportation is a top issue for older adults. “Women outlive their ability to drive by about 10 years,” she said. “Many older adults live in areas not served by public transportation.”

Lifespan also started Give A Lift, a program that recruits, screens and pairs drivers who volunteer at local organizations that offer free or low-cost transportation to seniors who need to get to medical appointments. The demand for rides is so large that some ride services don’t take seniors on shopping trips or other errands to ensure that riders can make it to medical appointments. LifeSpan also provides information about transportation options in an area. McBride said about 350 to 400 volunteer drivers provide rides through various organizations after Lifespan’s screening. But as these drivers age out or move away, the organizations in the area constantly need more drivers.

The cost for a taxi ride round trip in Rochester can be around $30 or $40 — money that is needed to purchase medication or fill up a grocery cart for many seniors. Services such as Uber or Lyft cost even more. However, McBride said that “a lot of older adults don’t have smartphones. They also have a trust issue.”

Would you want to get in a car with someone you don’t know?” Volunteer drivers can sign up for a federal program that offers supplemental auto insurance if their own policy won’t cover passengers sufficiently. Most organizations offer volunteer drivers a small stipend to help with gas costs if they need it. Medical transportation also provides “a social outlet for the volunteer and the person picked up,” McBride said. “They can have some conversation and may even become friends.”

Many organizations receive a great deal of support from the community, including seniors, friends, and family members.

FISH

Project Friends in Service Here (FISH) in Rush/Herrietta serves people 65 plus who live in that school district and lack transportation to and from non-emergency medical appointments. Coordinator Audrey Beck said that FISH is “always looking for more volunteers.” It is a vital service, she said, “to build a leg to the people who receive help.”

FISH cannot provide rides to people who live outside of the Rush-Henrietta School District, but can transport those residing within the district to medical appointments within Monroe County. Like most non-emergency ride providers, volunteers are not able to drive their own vehicles and riders must be capable of walking, yet without transportation on their own.

Last year, FISH provided round-trip rides to more than 1,600 appointments among 35 volunteers who drove nearly 40,000 miles.

“Many people do have family in the area; however, they’re working. It’s hard for them to take the appointments.”

For those older adults need rides to see multiple specialists for chronic conditions. Or they may need multiple trips to address an acute issue, such as the up to 10 rides for cataract treatment, including pre-op visits, lens fitting, surgery and post-op care.

Volunteer drivers list times and days they’re available and any limitations about going into the city. “Our drivers all find it very satisfying and rewarding helping someone else,” Beck said.

For those who need to get to a grocery store, Beck recommends checking with a local senior center. The Henrietta Senior Center, for example, offers scheduled rides to shopping venues and can arrange for transportation to and from the center.

Getting a Free Ride

For more information on ride services for older adults in the Rochester area, call TRAC at 585-244-8400.

Lifespan Senior Center: 585-334-4030

Visit www.elderresource.org for a list of services in your county’s Department of Aging and Youth.

- Wayne County: 585-715-946-5623
- Orleans County: 585-396-4040 or 315-781-1328
- Monroe County: 585-753-6280

Episcopal Senior Life

Episcopal SeniorLife Communities in Rochester also partners with Give A Lift to offer free rides to ESLC neighborhood program members, though donations are appreciated for those able to give.

“Our vision is to help connect seniors with their neighborhood by providing transportation to community functions, social events and medical appointments, providing more options for seniors to age in their place of choice,” said Jennifer Rougooux, volunteer coordinator at Episcopal SeniorLife.

The program is currently being offered in Gates, Chili, Greece and Rochester’s South Wedge.

Rougooux views volunteer drivers as essential to maintaining independence for those who are no longer able to drive.

“Ride are connecting with and helping people live longer and fuller lives,” she added. “Volunteers also gain a sense of personal satisfaction by providing this ever important service, meet interesting people, and sometimes develop friendships.”

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How Pets Can Benefit Senior Health
By Deborah Jeanne Sergeant

Perhaps you always had pets as a kid but haven’t for years. Or maybe you never have had cats or dogs, yet want to have them now. Pets can provide social interaction, from dog walking, to pet visits to shopping for pet food. Simplepah said that pet therapy can help provide diversion and comfort for people who like animals. Instead of aimlessly walking, some take a break to sit and enjoy petting the animals.

“Sometimes residents really respond,” Simpelaar said. “It can go through their whole facial expression.”

Non-therapy animals are permitted, with their owners have registered and receive a Pet Card.

“They increase the environment for the residents,” Simpelaar said. “It’s something to look forward to every day and something to love.”

Some residents who have dementia sometimes experience agitation. Simplepah said that pet therapy can help provide diversion and comfort for people who like animals.

“Animals can be very calming,” Simpelaar said. “It’s something to take care of. It’s something to take care of. It’s something to look forward to every day and something to love.”

Though at St. Ann’s staff take care of any resident pet (the home has kept cats and birds), independent adults can feel a sense of responsibility that they need. Simpelaar said that his father dwells in an assisted living community, but is able to keep a dog. “It gives him a sense of purpose and social,” Simpelaar said.

He said that his father isn’t very outgoing, but the dog is, so it helps him interact with more people.

“A pet can give someone a reason to live, if the animal is that close to the person,” Simpelaar said.

It’s an inadvisable to surprise anyone with a pet as a gift. Older adults may have additional considerations, including the physical and financial ability to care for a pet. For the former, some assistance and access to medication can enable keeping a pet. A helper can aid in dog walking, changing the cat’s litter, or even feeding. Installing a dog run can reduce the need for dog walking. Placing a covered litter box on a flat-topped kitty condo could make scooping litter easier.

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