

Getting to Senior L.I.F.E. just got easier

Center buys van to pick up non-driving participants



Senior L.I.F.E. Center director Acsa Hitchens, left, prepares to drive participants at the Senior L.I.F.E. Center to their homes Thursday afternoon after a day of activities. Sitting in the center's newly purchased van are Adriene Forrest, of Rocklin; and Ed Almeida, Virginia and Bob Frietberthausen, and Edna Rossen, all of Roseville.

Martha Garcia, Loomis News Editor

South Placer residents who participate in the Senior L.I.F.E. Center in Loomis no longer have to worry about how to get there if they don't drive. The non-profit center, which is open to all Placer County residents over the age of 55, recently acquired a nearly new van. While many of the participants are active and drive to the center, transportation is provided for non-driving seniors.

Fred Hitchens, executive director, said the senior center purchased the 2009 12-passenger Ford Econoline van with community donations totaling more than \$20,000. "None of us wanted to get into the transportation business," Hitchens said. However, he said, the senior center board of directors decided they had no other option after funding from Placer County ended.

According to Hitchens, for many years Pride Industries transported seniors to the center through a subsidy provided by the county and the center's annual \$6,000 contribution toward costs. In December 2008, Hitchens said, he learned the county subsidy would end at the end of the year. "We spent the better part of 2009 negotiating with Placer County and the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency," he said. Senior center board members decided the surplus diesel bus they were offered would be a "money pit," and chose instead to purchase a van.

During 2009, Hitchens' wife and center co-director, Acsa Hitchens, used the couple's personal SUV to drive seniors to the center. Others who needed transportation were driven by family members. Currently, the Hitchenses both drive the "new" van. In addition to picking up seniors in Loomis, the Hitchenses drive to Granite Bay, Rocklin and Roseville to transport participants to the center, located on the grounds of the First United Methodist Church of Loomis. Participants also live in Lincoln and other parts of rural South Placer.

For 32 years, Fred Hitchens said, the church has donated the use of the facilities. "We give them a small pittance, but they provide more than we give, by far," he said. According to Fred Hitchens, the Senior L.I.F.E. Center was founded by members of the Loomis and Rocklin Soroptimist club, the Placer Adult School, and church members.



Placer County Supervisor Jim Holmes, left, is shown with Acsa and Fred Hitchens when they were presented the Senior Citizen Volunteers of the Year award by the Rotary Club of Rocklin/Loomis Basin last summer. In addition to their paid position as co-directors of the Senior L.I.F.E. Center, the Hitchens spend a great deal of time as advocates for seniors.

The center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursday; it is closed during August. There are 100 participants, with an average attendance of 46 seniors who each pay \$3 per day, which is waived for those who can't afford it. The fee covers a continental breakfast and lunch, as well as tai chi exercises, Stretchercise, art class, sewing and quilting, crafts, card games, special programs and an annual bus trip. Fred Hitchens said the participants' daily fee accounts for 20 percent of the center's \$44,000 annual budget. It also receives grants from the Town of Loomis, the city of Roseville, funds managed by the Sacramento Region Community Foundation, private donations, and contributions from Soroptimists of Loomis Basin, the Loomis Lioness Club, American Legion Post No. 775, and individuals.

Edna Rossen, of Roseville, said she uses a walker to get around. "Otherwise, I'm raring to go," she said. For Rossen, one of the benefits of participating at the center is the sociability. "I like the exercises ... and I like to talk with people," she said. She also appreciates riding to the center in the new van. "It's fantastic, very comfortable, and our driver is an exceptionally good driver," Rossen said.

Virginia Frierberthauer said she and her husband, Bob, look forward to Tuesdays and Thursdays when they get picked up in Roseville to be taken to the senior center. "Being with people our age means everything to us," Frierberthauer said. She also said the new van is "really neat," much nicer than a bus.

Acsa Hitchens issued an invitation to anyone over age 55 to make a trip to the senior center. "We're an active senior center that does a lot of exciting things with seniors, plus we provide delicious meals," she said. "Come and check us out any Tuesday or Thursday, as our guest. We never charge for a first visit."



Adriene Forrest, Ed Amedia, and Virginia and Bob Frierberthausen.



Edna Rossen gets ready to enter the new van.



Edna Rossen



Virginia and Bob Frierberthausen