

NEWS

MTA CELEBRATES & SEEKS VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

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This week Mason Transit Authority (MTA) celebrates National Volunteer Week. An initiative in place since 1974, the week-long

celebration dedicated to “inspiring, recognizing and encouraging people to seek out imaginative ways to engage in their communities” began with a proclamation from then-President Richard Nixon. “I urge all Americans to observe that week by seeking out an area in their community in which they can give to a needy individual or a worthy cause by devoting a few hours, or more, each week to volunteer service,” he wrote.

Today, National Volunteer Week continues. It is marked each year by a presidential proclamation.

Friday, President Barack Obama issued his proclamation for the 2016 event, which started on April 10 and goes until April 16. “Volunteers help drive our country’s progress, and day in and day out, they make extraordinary sacrifices to expand promise and possibility,” he wrote. “During National Volunteer Week, let us shed the cynicism that says one person cannot make a difference in the lives of others by embracing each of our individual responsibilities to serve and shape a brighter future for all.”

Mason Transit Authority operates a Volunteer Driver Program that uses volunteers who drive their own cars to transport seniors that are unable to drive themselves or use public transit to medical appointments and other essential errands. “Our volunteers are the cornerstone of this



MTA volunteer driver, Mick Baker, helping passenger, Sonya Huzzy, out of his car during one of their weekly trips to her medical appointments.

program, without them this valuable service does not exist. Their work enables MTA to fulfill the part of our mission that is all about increasing the quality of life in Mason County. We are beyond grateful for the support they give MTA and Mason County seniors every day," said Danette Brannin, Acting General Manager.

In 2015, MTA's volunteer drivers provided over 1,000 trips to 80 Mason County residents. The majority of those trips were for medical appointments outside the county, such as dialysis and cancer treatment centers. This was accomplished with only five volunteers, who drove an accumulation of almost 48,000 miles and donated about 2,000 hours to do so. Drivers are reimbursed their mileage costs, which MTA pays for through a partnership and funding from the Lewis-Mason-Thurston Area Agency on Aging.

Mick Baker, a resident of Allyn and MTA volunteer driver, said "My honest feeling is those that can should [volunteer]. The places where I pick people up are many times places I've never been, and as a result I've seen parts of Mason County that are so very special. The clients I'm able to help with rides are very appreciative, the surprising thing to me is many have become very much like best friends. Volunteering has given a real purpose to my retirement years. It is also a great break from too much golf and yard work."

One of Mick's regular trips is for another Allyn resident, Sonya Huzzy. She said, "Without MTA's help, I would be in a very difficult situation. I'd have to move if it wasn't available. I'm extremely grateful for this program. Every MTA driver has been on time picking me up at my home and taking me back from dialysis two days per week. I'm especially grateful to Mick, my regular driver. He always carries my bags to and from his car and always opens the passenger car door for me. MTA is very fortunate to have such a wonderful volunteer!"

MTA is trying to recruit more volunteers because there is a higher demand for service than they have drivers available. Christina Fremont said, "We are able to meet the highest priority needs, but we are still turning down requests about once a week due to a shortage of drivers. Our current drivers are amazing; some do multiple trips in one day and make it possible to serve as many people as we can. However, we cannot count on five people sustaining the program forever. The program benefits from having a large pool of volunteers to utilize for many reasons. The top reasons being that so we do not burn out any one driver and to best meet the needs of a growing population of senior citizens that will need this service more and more."

If you want more information about volunteering or need a ride, then contact Haley Wooten, Volunteer Coordinator, at 360-432-5723 or hwooten@masontransit.org.