

Mason Transit Authority celebrates, seeks more volunteers

STAFF REPORT

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This week, Mason Transit Authority (MTA) is celebrating National Volunteer Week by commending their volunteers and asking the community for more help.

Mason Transit Authority operates a volunteer driver program that uses volunteers who drive their own cars to transport seniors who are unable to drive themselves or use public transit to medical appointments and other essential errands.

"Our volunteers are the cornerstone of this program; without them this valuable service does not exist," said Danette Bramin, acting general manager. "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."

In 2015, MTA's volunteer drivers provided more than 1,000 trips to 80 Mason County residents, according to a news release.

The majority of those trips were for medical appointments outside the county, such as dialysis and cancer treatment. This was accomplished with only five volunteers, who drove an accumulation of almost 48,000 miles and donated about 2,000 hours. 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 volunteering was a natural decision.

"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," he said. "The clients I'm able to help with



Mason Transit Authority volunteer Mick Baker, left, helps Sonya Huzzzy out of a car as part of the MTA Volunteer Driver Program.

rides are very appreciative; the surprising thing to me is many have become very much like best friends."

One of Baker's regular trips is for another Allyn resident, Sonya Huzzzy.

"Without MTA's help, I would be in a very difficult situation. I'd have to move if it wasn't available," Huzzzy said. "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." But with only five volunteers and endless driving, the MTA is seeking more help.

MTA is trying to recruit more volunteers because there is a higher demand for service than they have drivers available.

"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," said Christina

Photo courtesy of Mason Transit Authority

Fremont, MTA outreach manager. "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."

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