

Smart COMMUTER

Issue No. 47 Fall 2011

Commute Information for Business Executives & Elected Officials in Northern New Jersey

Innovative Transportation Program Reaches out to People With Reduced Mobility In Union County

Expanding its efforts to serve those with reduced mobility, defined as those with a mental or physical disability, EZride will launch its *Flex-T Mobility Partner* program in Union County on October 1, 2011. The much anticipated transportation service will cover a 24 mile one way commute from New Providence to North Branch in Somerset County.

The fast-growing service will be yet another step in the right direction in helping people with special needs cope with their everyday transportation challenges.

The *Flex-T* program, named for its ability to provide flexible and affordable transportation for those with reduced mobility, is funded in part by the Kessler Foundation. It relies on a team of dedicated volunteer drivers who use EZ Ride cars to provide curb-to-curb transportation for the journey to work.

The program was initially launched in 2010 in Monmouth County and currently serves 60 clients and provides about 700 rides per month using a fleet of four sedans/vans and team of volunteers. The cars used for the program can be easily recognized by the blue and green colored EZ Ride logo.

To learn more about the *Flex-T Mobility Partner* program, or to serve as a volunteer, please contact our program coordinators:

Essex/Union – Ellie Ferrer 973-961-6941
Monmouth – Wendy Arias 732-462-3333



Empowered by EZ Ride *Community Cars* program, Claire Williams, a happy Fanwood senior is on her way to a hair salon in Scotch Plains, thanks to people like Rudolph Ball, one of many dedicated volunteer drivers!

Seniors Give A Vigorous Nod To Community Car Program

They may not have pumped their fists in the air or yelled, “Free at last,” but, judging from their enthusiastic support for the *Community Cars* program, seniors at Chelsea Senior living in Fanwood, sure seemed to feel that way.

Several seniors signed up for the program on the very first day during an information event at Chelsea Senior Living, a facility that provides seniors with independent and assisted living.

What was so appealing about this program? Was it the affordable distance-based per-trip fee? Was it because the program came with no trip restrictions, which in practical terms, meant they could now visit their local hair salon, doctor’s office, go grocery shopping, or attend a bingo game? Or was it because the program offered them personalized curb-to-curb transportation?

It was obvious that, to these seniors the community car program meant a lot more than all of the above. They viewed it as freedom on wheels...freedom to go anywhere and do anything without relying on family & friends. The program offered a sense of empowerment.

Launched in 2008 in North Arlington in Bergen County, with generous funding from the National Center for Senior Transportation and tireless dedication of our volunteer drivers, the *Community Cars* program currently serves 200 clients in 35 communities in north Jersey.

Expanding the reach of the *Community Cars* program is not an option. It is a necessity. Let’s give our older adults in our community the freedom they so richly deserve.

For more information, please contact:

Ellie Ferrer, 973-961-6941;
eferrer@ezride.org

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Businesses Eye Vanpooling As Viable Option In Hard Economic Times

Whether you are an employer or an employee, you can't ask for a better deal than vanpooling, especially now when the economy is in the doldrums and people are trying to stretch every dollar as far as it can go.

If you are an employee, you can ride between home and work in style and comfort for just \$7 a day. You can commute in a cozy, well-equipped, 14-passenger van for up to 80-miles, round-trip...totally free from the stress of dealing with rush hour traffic and finding a parking space. Think about how much you can save on gas, parking, insurance, maintenance and repairs! On top of that, you can save your own car from wear and tear, keeping it spotless and shiny for those special occasions.

Also, you will end up paying a lot less for vanpooling because of Meadowlink's ability to broker vanpool services through state subsidies and pre-tax commuter benefits. These include \$175/month from NJ Transit and \$150/month for vanpools using HOV (High Occupancy Vehicles) lanes.

There are other "peace of mind" benefits too. If you sign up for vanpooling, you can rest assured that you will not be stranded in case of family emergencies or other unexpected events. In these situations where you may need a ride home outside your regular schedule, you are guaranteed a ride

home from work up to 3 times a year.

On the other hand, if you are an employer vanpooling would put a smile on your face too. Consider this: In addition to the immediate benefit of gaining a happy employee who arrives at work on time and is more productive, you will save a lot by eliminating the need for new parking facilities and in-house program management when you participate in vanpooling.

Numbers don't lie

The story about vanpooling as a great commuting option gets even better when one crunch the numbers. The financial incentives and the tax benefits for both employer and employee are hard to ignore.

Estimated financial incentives and the tax benefits

- Empty seat subsidy for first 3 months vanpool operation - \$60/seat/month
- Federal income tax savings - \$690/year*
- Pay roll tax savings (for both employer and employee) - \$211/year**
- Annual savings -(for employee)- \$901/year

Both employers and employees who take advantage of vanpooling will certainly have the wind at their backs going forward in this uncertain economic climate.

For more information please contact:

Joji Sai: (201) 939-4242;
jsai@ezride.org

* Estimate based on the assumption that an employee's vanpool commutation cost is equal to the present cap of \$230 (pre-income tax deduction allowed by IRS) per month or \$2,760 annually, in the most common federal income tax bracket of 25%.

** Estimate based on the fact that payment on pay roll tax for Social Security and Medicare on \$2,760 can be avoided.

Employers In the Spotlight

For Kean University Freshmen, It Was The Case Of Ez Come, Ez Go!

Milling crowds of anxious parents...noise of incessant speeches by professors... shouting student volunteers...wafts smells of international foods. It's freshman orientation at Kean!

Even as they were relishing the thrills of entering a new phase in their lives, the incoming students at Kean University had to deal with yet another source of excitement: EZ ride Carpooling.

Many students present at the orientation were excited to learn about the advantages of carpooling. Many viewed carpooling as an absolute necessity to survive the cash-starved freshmen years. A total of 105

freshmen signed up immediately and joined the 824 students who are already in the carpool program bringing the grand total to 929 carpoolers. Nearly 85% of these students (791 students) have teamed up to carpool and while the remaining 138 are still looking for carpool partners.

The Kean University campus with 15,939 students is located in Union NJ. Parking is a major constraint. Many students choose carpooling as their transportation alternative to save time and money.

For more information, in hosting a similar event, please contact:

Ellie Ferrer (973) 961-6941;
eferrer@ezride.org

Shorelink Shuttle's Maiden Voyage is A Summer Success!

July 1, 2011 marked the beginning of the Shorelink Shuttle, a Meadowlink-operated service that helps thousands of riders get from local train stations to where they need to go. As a cooperative effort between Meadowlink and the shoreline communities of Asbury Park, Belmar, Bradley Beach, Neptune Township, Ocean Grove and Monmouth County, the Shuttle operates Thursday through Sunday and carries visitors and residents from the train stations to the local beaches and business districts.

This summer, the Shuttle served on average more than 50 clients daily, with service costing a nominal fee of \$1 per trip. The response from riders has been one of appreciation. Said one happy rider, "I'm 82 and no longer drive. Without this shuttle I'd have no way of visiting my

grandkids." Another rider said, "*Parking in some of these small communities is hard to come by. The Shuttle is an ideal solution for getting around.*"

As some routes concluded their operation on Labor Day weekend, communities such as Belmar, Asbury Park and Ocean Grove have extended shuttle service until the end of September.

The shuttle will begin service next year on Memorial Day weekend.

Funding for the shuttle was made possible by a grant intended to reduce congestion and air quality (CMAQ) and contributions from all of the communities that participated.

If you would want to participate in the program next year, please contact:

Wendy Arias 732-462-3333;
warias@ezride.org

Is Your Company a Smart Work Place?

In order to help employees get to work, more and more businesses are supporting innovative commute programs. These programs not only help benefit the economy, they also boost quality of life. For this reason, New Jersey wants to recognize those businesses.

Qualifying workplaces will be recognized by the *New Jersey Smart Workplaces (NJSW)* program.

Applications are now available.

Winners will be publicly recognized at the annual Recognition Event planned in the fall of 2011.

To become a Smart Workplace, employers must actively support alternative commuting behaviors among their employees.

There are four levels of excellence – Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze. For more information about *NJSW* program or to request an application, please contact:

Kinga Skora 201-939-4242;
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Comments? Suggestions?

Feel free to forward your thoughts on improving the

Smart Commuter

to Kinga Skora at (201) 939-4242

or

e-mail:

info@ezride.org



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Service Updates

Garfield Lassos Huge Success In Hosting Bike Rodeo

On September 10, 2011, Meadowlink, in cooperation with the City of Garfield, held a Bike Rodeo in support of the Safe Routes to School program. The purpose of the Bike Rodeo was to teach students basic bicycling skills and safety measures. More than 25 participants received certificates for completing the course and a short quiz.

Darleen Revielle, Garfield's Safe Routes to School Coordinator said, "The event was very successful, not to mention the culmination of many organizations and volunteers working together to develop a positive bicycling program for the children." Meadowlink played a pivotal role in this event. It provided the Bike Rodeo set-up, signs, coordination and volunteer training. The League of American Bicyclists also assisted in the training for the Saturday event. There were nine stations along the route offering a 45-minute course that included lessons on helmet fit, bike inspection, starting, stopping and signaling,

hazard avoidance, rules of the road, scanning for traffic coming from the rear and a review quiz at the end.

Each bicyclist received a bike helmet and fitting, a bike inspection and hang tag to remind children to inspect their bike every time before riding it, individualized bike training, a pedometer and tee shirt.

Safe Routes to School is a program sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Transportation and uses the Rutgers Voorhees Transportation Institute as a Statewide Reference Center for schools interested in the program. The program encourages developing a healthy, active lifestyle through the safe use of non motorized transportation. The Bike Rodeo is one of the programs offered as part of Safe Routes to School.

If you are interested in a Bike Rodeo in your community or at your school, please contact:

Nora Shepard at 201-939-4242;
nshepard@ezride.org.

Freebies galore.....

Transit Display for your worksite

Meadowlink is an advocate for public transportation and has a 'transit-first' policy.

Transit displays provide easy access to NJ Transit's information. These displays are available for your worksite free of cost.

Meadowlink will customize and set them up at your worksite. Each display is designed to hold commute information such as car/vanpool brochures, as well as all bus and train schedules relevant to your location.

To obtain a FREE display, please contact:

Michael Jensen (201) 939-4242;
mjensen@ezride.org