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COMMUNITY CARS PROGRAM BENEFITS VOLUNTEERS AS MUCH AS COMMUNITY
BECOME A VOLUNTEER DRIVER TODAY

Wood-Ridge, May 2014 – Meadowlink's *Community Cars* program, which provides low-cost, safe and reliable transportation for seniors who no longer drive themselves, is made possible thanks to volunteer drivers like North Arlington's Bob Martinelli.

Martinelli recently hit a volunteer driver milestone, logging more than 1,400 hours of service. "I'm a volunteer at heart," said Martinelli, who has been with *Community Cars* since the inception of the program in 2008.

"He's a big hit with his customers and colleagues alike," said Meadowlink's Executive Director Krishna Murthy.

Community Cars' volunteer drivers make a meaningful difference in their communities, enjoy incentives, and get an opportunity to decrease the cost of their personal auto insurance while doing something they love to do anyway. The effort is minimal, but the impact is incalculable.

While the senior population in the U.S. has been growing steadily for the last six years in a trend that is slated to peak in 2030 at 71.5 million seniors, New Jersey in particular will see a 60 percent increase in senior citizens. This trend was instrumental in the development of the *Community Cars* program.

Last year, the dedicated team of *Community Cars* volunteer drivers provided over 10,000 rides. While drivers donate their time, EZ Ride provides the cars and insurance. The drivers' valuable contributions enabled hundreds of seniors to keep their medical appointments, go grocery shopping, or just visit family and friends.

The program provides affordable and flexible transportation for seniors; rides are not restricted and can be used for shopping, lunches with friends, or salon and medical appointments. This type of transportation may seem trivial, but it helps to combat the isolation and helplessness that can sometimes accompany old age. The independence lost by being unable or unwilling to drive can be very costly, both physically and mentally.

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The *Community Cars* program aims to cater to those seniors, and help them regain some of their freedom -- and provide some friendly company along the way -- for a fraction of the cost of taxi services.

Donating personal time to a single cause would be enough for most people, but Martinelli also volunteers for Queen of Peace Church in North Arlington. In addition, he's been a volunteer for North Arlington EMT. He is also an active participant on a senior Bocce ball league, and enjoys gardening, going to the gym and spending time with his granddaughter. He is married with two daughters.

What does Martinelli like best about volunteering at EZ Ride? Not having to drive his own vehicle: Late model Honda Accords, all fully insured and equipped with in-vehicle cameras, are provided for volunteers.

In exchange for a few hours a week, volunteers like Martinelli earn great incentives, including:

- A fun and easy way to make a difference in their communities
- Free defensive driving course which may lower the cost of their personal auto insurance
- A free ride for every four hours of volunteer service. The volunteers could bank their hours or transfer their rides to others.

Currently, the program serves over 500 seniors in just Bergen County and more volunteer drivers are needed to meet New Jersey's growing demand.

Launched in 2008 with seed funding from the National Center for Senior Transportation (NCST), *Community Cars* received the Beverly Foundation's prestigious STAR of Excellence Award. More recently in 2013, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) recognized Meadowlink as the "Urban Community Transportation System of the Year" for responding to the needs of the community with its model senior transportation program.

Meadowlink is a non-profit, public-private partnership that was created to improve access to affordable transportation, reduce traffic congestion and promote economic growth by working with business and government agencies to address the transportation challenges in Northern New Jersey. Under its EZ Ride brand, Meadowlink manages the state's largest carpool, vanpool and employee shuttle programs as well as senior transportation, special transportation and bike and pedestrian services.

For additional information, please visit Meadowlink online at: www.ezride.org. To find out more about becoming a volunteer driver, call Kinga Skora (201)939-4242 or email kskora@ezride.org.

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