

West Milford to begin trial of senior taxi service

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BY DAVID M. ZIMMER
STAFF WRITER
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EZ Ride Community Cars Chairman Perry Frenzel (R) invites West Milford Councilman Philip Weisbecker Jr. behind the wheel of an EZ Ride loaner vehicle that the township will use during a trial for the locally-established senior transportation program.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOE SARNO

Convenient curb-to-curb transportation was promised to local seniors, and the township plans to deliver starting July 11. EZ Ride Community Cars Chairman Perry Frenzel (R) invites West Milford Councilman Philip Weisbecker Jr. behind the wheel of an EZ Ride loaner vehicle that the township will use during a trial for the

locally-established senior transportation program.

The long-awaited three-month pilot run for the personalized transportation service EZ Ride Community Cars begins next week and to ensure the offering is given a fair trial, WEST MILFORD will hold a pair of information and enrollment sessions for residents 60 years and older on July 13. The first will be held at the Hillcrest Community Center from 10 a.m. to noon. The second will run from 12:30 to 2 p.m. at Bald Eagle Commons' Grange Hall.

If the program is successful and demand is high, the service could be continued with eased clientele restrictions and expanded hours of operation, according to Keith Knudsen, the township's head of community services.

The appointment-based transportation service will start on a limited weeknight and weekend schedule, with trips costing \$5 for the first 10 miles each way and each additional mile costing 50 cents – for one or two riders. Caregivers and companions ride free of charge.

The program, which started in North Arlington and Lyndhurst in 2008 with the assistance of a National Center for Senior Transportation grant, will give local seniors no restrictions on trip purpose or frequency. And while qualified residents will be limited somewhat by range, jaunts to neighboring towns – for doctor or hospital visits, for example – and to the Rockaway and Willowbrook malls will be permitted.

During the trial, volunteer drivers will operate a single vehicle owned by EZ Ride.

Riders, who will be exempt from the program's \$15 registration fee throughout the experiment, will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis.

The program will officially begin next Monday, after unresolved issues concerning insurance coverage for the program's loaner vehicle helped push back the program's April 4 start date, according to township officials. However, the three-month holdup is not expected to hinder the trial, as the additional time has allowed the township to build its base of prospective clients and its ever-critical stable of volunteer drivers.

According to EZ Ride, the lack of personnel expenses allows the program to provide transportation to seniors at less than half the actual cost of rides on average – taking into account maintenance, insurance, and fuel costs.

For more information on the service, including how to enroll or become a volunteer driver, call the West Milford Department of Community Service and Recreation at 973-728-2860.

E-mail: zimmer@northjersey.com