

WET MOUNTAIN VALLEY ROTARY TRANSPORTATION VAN PROJECT

The first thoughts and ideas about the Rotary Van Project were discussed at a Rotary Dinner Night Out. Lori Gaide (spouse to member Art Gaide) was visiting with member Bill McAlee about a van the Clinic had operated but no longer provided. Later that week, Bill discussed the subject with a few other Rotary members and decided to approach the Clinic board to see if the Rotary club would be allowed to operate the van for six months. The Clinic board agreed and, in fact, continued to pay the insurance on the van for that period of time. The Rotary club was now in the transportation business.

Members Art Gaide and Ned Freestone inspected the van and arrangements were made with the Sheriff's department to park the van in the Sheriff's parking area with the keys being kept in their front office. Another van was purchased for the cost of one dollar from Ray and Mary Lou Koch and the Rotary van project was up and running.

Some Rotary club members were concerned about the liability aspects of having the van operated under the Rotary club's name and how a lawsuit would affect individual members. After consulting with an attorney, it was determined there would not be any liability to individual members because the van had the proper insurance. With the help of member Gene Nieges, a 501(c) (3) was established in June of 2004, with the name being registered as: Wet Mountain Valley Community Service, Inc., and generally referred to as the Rotary Van Service. A board of directors was formed and member Art Gaide volunteered to maintain the vehicles while member Gary Frickell set up a computer program to operate the appropriate financial books.

Bill and Eileen McAlee were instrumental in finding funding for the project and contacted an organization called "RIDE" which was the Fremont County Transportation System. They agreed to help with some funding since our service provided rides into their county. Next, was the primary funding from the Department on Aging. Due to community members needing dialysis which requires a six hour wait period, we needed another vehicle and it was obtained by the Department on Aging writing a grant in our behalf. Additional funds were still needed to operate the service. Eileen McAlee found a book listing organizations funding our type of transportation and she began writing grants for our continued funding needs. Additional funding is solicited from the following: The Wet Mountain Community Foundation, Upper Area Agency on Aging, Upper Arkansas Council of Governments, The American Legion, the Town of Westcliffe, Custer County Board of Supervisors, and donations from community members.

The McAlee personal phone system and number was the first dispatch center for needy community members to call for a ride. This also required reaching out to volunteer drivers and scheduling rides on a daily basis. Eileen held that position for eighteen months until a grant was written to enable the service to hire Rose Lovelace as a dispatcher. A separate telephone number was established and is still in use today. Louise Peter (spouse to member Horst Peter) was the dispatcher for a period of five years and the position is currently held by Shelly Penkoff.

Most of the people in the transportation business did not believe we could run our project with just volunteers, but that is exactly what has happened. We have drivers from the Rotary club and drivers from the community volunteer their time. Many drive more than once a week taking people to Pueblo, Canon City, Colorado Springs, Salida, and even Denver, as well as Westcliffe.