



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

DRIVING PATIENTS to medical appointments is a satisfying way to volunteer for first Ela Mae, and now Caesar Hardy.

Driving Is Caesar Hardy's Way Of Doing Something For Others

BY SUSAN USHER

"I'm not going to wear out my car for nothing."

That's the "what's in it for me?" attitude Caesar Hardy encounters regularly when he tries to encourage someone to follow in his tracks.

For the past 12 or 13 years the Shallotte area resident has commuted the highways to and from Bolivia, Wilmington, Myrtle Beach, Whiteville, sometimes as far as Fayetteville. He hasn't traveled alone.

Hardy is one of four transportation volunteers with the Brunswick County Department of Social Services, donating his time to both the Medicaid and aging programs. Together the volunteers typically make 70 round trips a month, sometimes traveling to Durham or Chapel Hill to see that clients get the medical care they need.

Hardy sticks to shorter trips. In August he logged more than 3,000 miles and donated 236 hours to the volunteer job he inherited from his wife, Ela Mae, who sometimes substitutes for him now.

"Somebody needed to work and he couldn't because he's disabled," she says, "so I did." Whenever work's available, she sews for Kool-A-Brew, a company near Calabash, and also takes in sewing at home.

Hardy and volunteers L.H. Morgan, Louise Bryant and Penny Bryant barely make a dent in demand for the service—a demand that's expected to increase dramatically after the first of the year. Already all 7,410 Medicaid-eligible county residents qualify if they need transportation. After Jan. 1, all SSI clients (those birth and older with a disabling condition or age 65 or older and not eligible for Social Security) automatically become eligible for Medicaid and will be screened for transportation needs.

"We need more volunteers. It's especially important for the children we serve. The health department is pushing to make sure children get the immunization shots and the preventive care they need," said Evelyn Johnson, adult services supervisor with the Brunswick County Social Services Department.

"It's a good reason to get up in the morning and to sleep good at night, because you know you've done something good."—Caesar Hardy

"Sometimes we have to say 'we just can't meet this need,' even though transportation is supposed to no longer be a barrier to clients receiving services."

Volunteers can drive as often or as little as their schedule allows. They are required to carry \$50,000 per person/per incident and \$50,000 property damage liability insurance and to have a valid driver's license. Beyond that, Johnson says the main requirements are "patience and understanding."

Caesar Hardy has both, gently handling clients who try to abuse the service by demanding side trips to the grocery store or to visit a relative, and waiting patiently while they receive services. He uses the time to read his Bible or Sunday school lesson.

He could be sitting at home on Smith Avenue in front of the TV whining about his lot in life. In 1963 he was injured in a subway accident, losing his left leg and the use of his right arm. More recently two encounters with cancer of the larynx have resulted in removal of his larynx.

Instead he drives. Hardy's roomy Oldsmobile offers a comfortable ride to patients, most of whom would rather be going someplace else than to the doctor's

office, health department, therapy center or hospital.

"That's all I ever use my car for," he says. "The Lord made it possible for me to have it, and I told him that is what I'd do with it."

He credits to the Lord's care also that the car runs with fewer problems than the average driver might have. "It's only broken down with me one time on the road," he says proudly.

With a 28.5-cents per mile mileage reimbursement rate and no pay, it's obvious the volunteers don't drive for the money, something many of Hardy's friends and neighbors don't understand.

"I've tried to convince others to do it," he says, "but they just won't. I tell them that as Christians it's our duty—helping people who can't help themselves—but that doesn't go very far with them."

The rewards might not be tangible, but for him "it's a good reason to get up in the morning and to sleep good at night, because you know you've done something good," Hardy said. "I love to be doing something for people."

Editor's Note: Anyone interested in becoming a transportation volunteer for the Brunswick County Department of Social Services may contact Evelyn Johnson, 253-4391, Ext. 487.

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