

November 6, 2013- Verde Valley Caregivers & Cottonwood Area Transit Partner to Provide Transportation to Place-bound Older Adults

Verde Valley Caregivers Coalition and Cottonwood Area Transit-CAT, are partnering to provide transportation to older adults who can no longer drive due to age limitations or a disability. VVCC's Executive Director Kent Ellsworth said the demand for assistive transportation is due to our growing older adult population. "We currently have a 175% increase in neighbor requests for rides compared to this time last year. It's important that we continue to partner with transportation providers to meet the growing need."

So far this year, VVCC volunteers have contributed to 150,000 miles in driving that are handled through the organization's One-Call Center; the main hub which receives up to 100 service requests daily throughout the Verde Valley. When volunteers are not available to transport neighbors to critical appointments, VVCC contracts with transportation vendors such as CK's Need A Lift and Tender Hearts Transportation.

Funding for these services comes from Arizona Department of Transportation, Northern Arizona Council of Governments, and Verde Valley Medical Center. "Even with our current funding and transportation partners, the rate of growth is so rapid; we continuously need to seek additional resources," Ellsworth said. "CAT Paratransit provides another option to help our neighbors get where they need to go."

CAT offers two unique transportation services for residents of Cottonwood, Clarkdale, and Verde Villages. For regular residents CAT has two fixed bus routes. Routes connect on the hour at Cottonwood Library where riders can transfer from one bus route to another without waiting. Buses run from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday thru Friday and serve signed bus stops located all along the routes.

For persons who are disabled or cannot use the fixed bus route system, CAT offers CAT Paratransit. CAT Paratransit offers origin to destination services to locations that are $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from a fixed bus stop. The services are a shared ride experience and require at least a 24 hour notice. Paratransit is a national program. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, a civil rights bill, was designed to remove the barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in American society.

Under ADA, agencies like CAT, are required to provide demand responsive services that mirrors their fixed route system. For those who qualify, Paratransit serves as a safety net for those whose physical, cognitive, emotional, visual, or other sensory disabilities make them unable to ride the traditional fixed route system.

Bruce Morrow, CAT Manager, said he and his staff are happy to provide assistance to the area's older adults. "Our drivers are really very good. They really care about our customers and want to make sure that they have a comfortable experience."

Debbie Calkins, CAT ADA Compliance Technician, added "We are very fortunate to offer CAT Paratransit in Cottonwood, Clarkdale, and Verde Villages." In the immediate area, the only other communities that offer Paratransit are Chino Valley and Flagstaff. A team of VVCC volunteers, all residents of Cottonwood, will help facilitate the CAT Paratransit eligibility process.

"This special team of Volunteers will be working one-on-one with our new and existing neighbors in the Cottonwood area to help them understand the CAT services available to them," said Cecily MacArthur, mobility resources and eligibility coordinator. "This is a win-win collaboration for both organizations, and we are very excited to launch this new service."

Ellsworth said the new service will begin in mid-November. He added that Ride & Assist training will be provided to help neighbors better utilize the system.

If you can no longer drive due to age limitations and/or a disability and would like to participate in this program, please contact Kim Meller at kimmeller@vvcaregivers.org or (928) 204-1238.

Since 1992, VVCC has provided volunteers, programs, and services to support older adults and adults with disabilities who need assistance to maintain their independence and quality of life at home. In its first year of service, 50 volunteers provided transportation to 80 adults in need. In 2012, 300 volunteers provided services to over 1,800 neighbors.

If you would like to join the 300 volunteers who are making a difference in the lives of older adults, please contact Natalia Molina, Operations & Mobility Manager at (928) 204-1238 or email nataliamolina@vvcaregivers.org.