Transportation Options for Eras Clients

Eras Senior Network volunteers are responsible for driving many clients to and from medical appointments during the year but there are other transportation options available as well for older adults in the community.

Private cab services and county-run bus services are among additional alternatives to help clients with transportation assistance. “We are not the only transportation provider in the area for older adults,” says Sophia Franklin, program director of Eras’ Milwaukee County Faith in Action. “Our goal is to provide transportation services to those who do not have any other options available to them.”

During the past 12 months, Eras volunteers have provided an astonishing 11,450 rides for older adults in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties. Like always, some requests could not be filled for a variety of reasons such as additional care being needed from the volunteer or because simply, there were not enough volunteers available.

When additional care is needed, medical transportation is an appropriate option. “Anything beyond guiding a client to a vehicle is when medical transportation is important,” says Franklin. “Our volunteers are not trained to safely lift or maneuver people in and out of vehicles and wheelchairs. At times, the transportation needs of a client may exceed what our volunteers can do safely.”

Then there’s the issue of limited resources. Eras has a certain number of volunteers available to provide transportation for older adults. If older adults were to sometimes take alternative transportation options when available, the resources could be better used.

The difference between Eras services and professional transportation services is that Eras services are not guaranteed. “Because we work solely with volunteers, we cannot always guarantee services,” says Franklin. “These other services, however, can guarantee rides.”

Included in this newsletter is a listing of available transportation options for the county in which you live.

Judith Amorsen, program director of Waukesha County Faith in Action, says Eras transportation partners provide good, reliable and safe alternatives to Eras volunteers. “We trust our partners,” says Amorsen. “And it’s not bad to use a cab service or government service when necessary. While no transportation option will be perfect, there are good options available.”

Amorsen says Eras staff can even help older adults utilize a new service. “If you are apprehensive, please let us know,” she says. “If you are concerned about safety or have other things you want to discuss, please let us know. We always have time to address your concerns. We can even help you call to arrange a ride with another service.”

Franklin says many Eras clients use both Eras volunteers and alternative services to get to their medical appointments. “Our services are there for those who do not have other options and that includes financial options,” she says. “Utilizing our limited resources wisely helps keep services available for those who truly have no other options.”

The Winter Blues, another name for seasonal affective disorder (SAD), is a form of depression that cycles with the seasons. It can occur during any time of the year, but it typically affects people during the winter.

As the weather gradually gets colder and the days get shorter, people affected by winter-induced SAD may begin to feel the symptoms of depression. Common signs of SAD include: feeling of sadness or depressed mood, change in sleep - usually sleeping too much, loss of energy, feeling worthless or guilty, trouble concentrating or making decisions.

Fortunately, there are several steps you can take to help prevent the Winter Blues. Focus on making changes in each aspect of your well-being during the winter months.

- Physical - Move your body, eat well, contact your local rec department for wellness classes
- Emotional - Write in a journal, practice mindfulness
- Social - Talk with a friend or contact your local senior center for class offerings
- Environmental - Get outside, even for just a few minutes!
- Spiritual - Embrace the season and find things you like about it

It is normal to have some days when you feel down, especially during the winter months. If you think you may be experiencing something more serious than the fleeting Winter Blues, talk with your doctor. Your doctor can work with you to diagnose the cause of the symptoms and make recommendations that will help you feel better.

If you are interested in receiving a phone call from a volunteer once a week, please contact Eras to sign up for our Friendly Phone Call program! A volunteer will call to talk with you or just make sure you’re doing okay.
For Vicki Henning, Christmas doesn’t come without Advent, a period of waiting that begins four Sundays before Christmas.

“Advent is special because it’s the leading up to Christmas,” says Vicki, who works in Eras’ Greendale office and who is also Greenfield Park Lutheran Church’s organist. “While our society is swept up in the whole commercialism of Christmas, Advent grounds us in the real meaning of the season.”

Vicki says Advent offers her a time of hope, joy and even repentance but it also reminds her that Christ came once and will come again.

The Advent Wreath is an important part of the season, says Vicki. Its four candles represent four parts of Advent: prophecy of light from the Messiah’s birth; journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem; joy from the shepherds; and peace brought by the angels.

“Advent helps me think of the more serious part of Christmas rather than whether I have enough cookies baked or if all the presents are wrapped.”

Merle Dubin and her family celebrate Hanukkah each year to commemorate and honor the struggle by Jewish people to practice their religion.

Merle, who works in Eras’ Milwaukee Faith in Action office, says the Maccabees went to war against the Greek-Syrian rulers over the issue. After they won the war, the Jewish people had a celebration called The Festival of Lights by lighting an oil-filled menorah. The oil was only supposed to last one day, but miraculously it lasted eight.

“Ever since then, the Jewish people light their Menorahs with candles to honor our freedom and our religion,” says Merle.

Merle and her family which includes four children and grandchildren celebrate Hanukkah by exchanging gifts and eating traditional foods such as potato latkes and jelly donuts.

“And every night we light a different candle to remember our history,” says Merle. “It’s really very beautiful.”

Freda Wright and her family celebrate Christmas on December 25, and from December 26 - January 1, they observe Kwanzaa to acknowledge their African American heritage and customs.

Freda, who is Program Manager at the Eras Harambee Neighborhood office, says Kwanzaa uses a seven-branched candleholder called a Kinara with each candle representing one of the Seven Principles: unity, self-determination, responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

Gifts, usually homemade, are given to each other, and there is an emphasis to remember those family members who have passed, she says. And there is a lot of talking – discussions among everyone about the principle of that specific day.

“We’ve been doing this for quite some time now and each year, the celebration gets better,” says Freda. “Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday to celebrate our culture and to help us remember how we belong. And, it helps me to reflect how I will bring purpose, creativity, and collective work in the coming year to my community.”
Vision Health Important for Healthy Living

By Dr. Amy Weaver, Optometrist, Froedtert Westbrook Health Center, Froedtert Health and Medical College of Wisconsin

Given how important good vision is to enjoying life and remaining independent, the value of an annual eye exam cannot be overstated. There are multiple eye conditions that one should be screened for at every eye exam including macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Age related macular degeneration (ARMD) is a condition where the macular area of the retina degenerates, causing a serious decline in the central vision. It is the leading cause of blindness in people over age 50. Risk factors for ARMD include: age, smoking, race (Caucasian), family history, prolonged sun exposure, poor diet, hypertension, obesity and light eye color. There are two forms of the disease, dry and wet. The dry form is treated with high dose vitamins while the wet form is treated with injections of medication by a retinal specialist to reverse macular swelling. Symptoms of ARMD include blurred or wavy central vision, and dark or missing areas of the central vision. To monitor for ARMD, the macular area should be carefully examined by your eye doctor at every annual dilated eye exam.

Glaucoma is a condition that affects the optic nerve health. When pressure inside the eye is too high, or when blood flow and oxygen delivery to the optic nerve are compromised, slow damage occurs over time. This results in slow but permanent loss of peripheral vision, resulting in tunnel vision and/or very little vision if left untreated. Glaucoma is a sneaky disease; there are often no early warning symptoms. Risk factors for glaucoma include: family history of glaucoma, high eye pressure, eye trauma, migraines, sleep apnea, poor circulation, ocular inflammation and low blood pressure. The disease is treated with eye drops and sometimes, surgery. The best way to detect glaucoma is with a dilated eye exam, eye pressure reading and careful optic nerve evaluation by the eye doctor.

Diabetic retinopathy is a condition caused by poorly controlled diabetes. When the blood sugar is too high, the walls of the blood vessels in the retina become leaky. Blood and fluid leak into the retinal tissue and cause macular swelling and hemorrhaging, which can lead to severe vision loss. Symptoms include blurred vision, new spots (floaters) in vision and sometimes flashing lights. The best way to prevent diabetic retinopathy is to control one's blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol. Dilation of the pupils allows a full view of the retina to detect this disease and is advised annually for diabetics.

Detecting eye disease before it reaches advanced stages is the best way to prevent vision loss. Other preventative measures include healthy living habits: Eating a balanced diet rich in antioxidant vegetables and dark leafy greens, exercise, no smoking and wearing UV protection over the eyes when outdoors.
Keeping Heating Costs Low During the Winter

Experts are predicting that heating bills this winter will be higher than normal because the price of natural gas has more than doubled this year and there is a high worldwide demand for natural gas.

In fact, We Energies estimates that the typical residential customer will pay $25 more a month this winter compared to last winter. If a bill is too high for your budget, there are options available for assistance. And there are things to do in your home which can help keep your heating costs low.

We Energies offers free energy savings kits to customers. Each kit contains window film, a LED night light, a LED light bulb and a power switch that disconnects all power to an electronic device.

“Installing window film is a simple step that ensures cold air stays outside and warm air stays inside, which can help lower your energy bill all winter long,” says Alison Trouy, a spokesperson for We Energies. “Installing window film not only improves your comfort by reducing drafts in the wintertime, it can also save you money on your energy bill.”

Utilizing LED light bulbs can also save money. “By switching from incandescent light bulbs to LED light bulbs, you are using considerably less energy and that’s more money in your pocket,” Trouy says.

To receive the free energy savings kit, call We Energies at (800) 242-9137. Customers having difficulty paying a high heating bill can turn to the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) for assistance, says Trouy. Administered by each county in Wisconsin, the program provides qualified customers with a one-time annual payment toward heating and electric bills. Eligibility is based on the household’s previous month of income.

The amount of energy assistance a customer receives depends on several factors, including household size, income and energy cost. For more information on energy assistance, call We Energies at (800) 242-9137 to discuss options including energy assistance and flexible payment plans. If a customer enters into a payment plan, they will not be at risk of disconnection, Trouy says.

Maricela Gaona, of the Milwaukee County Housing Division, says that if a person were to find themselves in a crisis situation during the winter because of no heat, help is available. Milwaukee County residents can call (414) 270-4653 or after hours, 2-1-1. In Waukesha County, individuals can call Energy Services Inc. (800) 506-5596, says Gaona.