



Soroptimist's 33-year history with the Senior Program

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One of the greatest concerns people have as they are aging is “how long will I be able to live in my home?” Soroptimist International of Ashland (SIA) recognized this concern and set out to do something about it.

In 1975, SIA began negotiations with the city to provide transportation for seniors to doctor appointments, grocery shopping, the senior meal site and other essential errands to help our most vulnerable live longer in their own homes. SIA would provide an 11-passenger van, pay the insurance, help pay for maintenance costs and the Senior Program would do the scheduling for rides and the day-to-day operations. The van arrived in 1977 and began a 22-year collaborative effort between Soroptimist and the Senior Program providing transportation and so much more. It soon became apparent that the van was too small to accommodate the ridership and it was also difficult for some to access the van. Kay Stein, Senior Program Director at that time, did some research and found that we may be

eligible for an ODOT grant to purchase a 17-passenger bus. SIA had been setting aside money for an upgrade and, with grant writing help from Ms. Stein, an 80/20 matching grant was made to SIA. At that time the insurance and maintenance support to the city was increased by SIA to \$3,500 per year. It was a long and interesting process and in 1984 the bus arrived but had to be sent back due to safety issues with the step and seat belts. Corrections were made and soon the Senior Shuttle was making its way around Ashland.

Our seniors loved this bus, which provided much social interaction. One couple even met on the bus and was later married. There were many fun and educational trips through the years. One critical role of this program was providing extra safety for those living alone. If someone who regularly rode the bus did not call to schedule a ride or did not come out when the bus stopped at the home, someone would follow-up to make sure they were OK. These services don't just happen. They occur because the longtime staff and volunteers get to know the people they serve and listen to their needs. In the 22 years of the transportation program there were only two drivers.

In 1992 another ODOT grant allowed the upgrade to a 22-passenger bus with a lift. In just one year 8,378 rides were provided. The program was discontinued in 1999 due to decreasing ridership. Was anyone able to live longer in their home during those 22 years of transportation service? That is difficult to measure, but I believe it did and it certainly made life easier and safer for them.

Another example of a joint effort between Soroptimist International of Ashland and the Ashland Senior Program is the Foot Care Clinic. Again the Senior Program staff set out

to meet the needs of those who could not afford this specialized service by reaching out to SIA for sponsorship and working with the specialized nurses who donate a portion of their time, thereby reducing the cost to the client. This is such an essential service especially for those with diabetes, Parkinson's Disease, neuropathy or other issues. There has been no discussion with SIA as to whether the Foot Care Clinic is going to continue following the Senior Program revamping. The SIA funds are in place and those who have been receiving this service for more than a decade are ready.

Mavis Cloutier has been a Soroptimist member since 1978 and has served as its Senior Program Board Chair.

Soroptimist International of Ashland is a dynamic and committed community organization that is happy to welcome new members. For more information, check out www.soroptimistrv.org, call President Janie Burcart at 541-910-0235 or email her at jburcart@eoni.com.