

CARTS — Helping You Take Care of You

By Jim Funk

Transportation program coordinator For Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Wednesday, December 16, 2015 12:30 am

In 1999, the Healthcare Consortium formed a program called the Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service, or CARTS.

The program was created to respond to a need of many Columbia County residents for transportation to and from medical appointments. This need was particularly acute in the more rural areas of the county, but could nevertheless be found in all parts of it, for any number of reasons. Sometimes, individuals lack a vehicle. Other times, they lack the financial resources to maintain it, fill its tank or pay its tolls. And in still other instances, even those with a vehicle in good working order and the resources to operate it no longer feel comfortable driving due to their age, an illness or injury.

In all of these cases, CARTS has been there to help. Since the program's inception, we have served nearly 4,000 Columbia County residents, provided over 132,000 trips to medical appointments and covered more than 1,900,000 miles.

Any Columbia County resident with a need for non-emergency medical transportation is eligible to receive this service; there are no other eligibility criteria considered. The service is "door-to-door," meaning that a CARTS driver will escort an individual from the threshold of their home or other pickup location to the threshold of a health care provider's office (anyone needing a greater level of assistance should be accompanied by a family member, friend or aide).

The service retrieves individuals from any location in Columbia County and will deliver people to locations throughout the county but also well beyond it. CARTS regularly provides trips to Albany and Kingston, Pittsfield and Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and Sharon, Connecticut, among other locations.

CARTS serves both individuals who are enrolled in Medicaid and those who are not. Those clients who are enrolled in Medicaid must call a company called MAS at 1-855-360-3546 to confirm eligibility for Medicaid transportation and receive prior authorization for the trip. During this call, people are encouraged to request the Healthcare Consortium as the preferred provider. While there is no guarantee that the Healthcare Consortium will provide that trip, making a request for the Healthcare Consortium by name will ensure that we are given the option to do so.

For those clients who are not enrolled in Medicaid, rides are provided at no charge and though donations are always welcome and much appreciated, an inability or unwillingness to make a donation will have no effect on whether a person is given a ride.

CARTS operates a fleet of 10 vehicles including sedans, minivans and a multi-passenger wheelchair accessible minibus, all of which are clean, smoke-free and very well-maintained. The drivers, many of

whom have been employed by the Consortium since the program's inception, are courteous, friendly and professional.

The service operates 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Transportation is scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, so it's important to contact our office as soon as a medical appointment is made to ensure that your transportation needs can be met. It is not unusual for us to be scheduled two weeks in advance for in-county trips and longer for out-of-county trips, so calling timely is key.

One might wonder how a service like this is possible. The service is supported, in part, by the Columbia County Board of Supervisors, the Columbia County Office for the Aging, the Columbia County Departments of Human Service, Health and Social Services, the New York state Office for Rural Health, the Foundation for Community Health, based in Sharon, and from donations made by clients and other supporters.

If you are a Columbia County resident and are having a difficult time getting to a medical appointment, contact CARTS at 518-822-8020 and let us help you take care of you.

Located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson, The Healthcare Consortium is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve access to quality health care for residents of Columbia and Greene counties. For more information, visit www.columbiahealthnet.org or call 822-8820.