

The Beginning of Community Care Car
Founded by Jim Lawson
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The Idea

The idea of a Community Care Car came from two sources, namely, my experience with a sheltered workshop and a Meals On Wheels program.

In the early 1970's while I was operating my real estate and development business, I was involved with reestablishing a sheltered workshop (an organization for the mentally and physically handicapped) which required returning it to a stable financial level. I had a great partner, Buzz Griffin, in the development business who didn't complain when I spent a tremendous amount of time with the workshop.

I was also involved with St. John's Church in Woodland about this same time. The minister, Bill Duay, was establishing the Meals On Wheels program.

The experience and knowledge I gained from both programs led to my recognizing the need for a transportation system for the elderly and retarded as well as how to establish one.

It was during my involvement with the sheltered workshop when I first noticed a great need for transportation. For an example, we were trying to get the clients involved in sports activities such as bowling. The major problem proved to be transportation. To be sure, there were great people who would help by transporting some of the people when they could, but it was obvious there was a great need and that a tremendous amount of benefit would result if a transportation system were established.

It also became obvious while being around Bill when he was establishing the Meals On Wheels program, where hot meals are delivered five days per week that the elderly needed transportation. I wondered about their other urgent needs. Who transported them to the doctor or dentist? How about shopping etc.? I discovered their loved ones and/or neighbors helped as much as they could. However, it was evident the elderly didn't want to burden anyone and wished to remain as independent as possible. Thus, the idea of a care car to transport the retarded and elderly was born.

We Get Going

I witnessed how Bill put the Meals On Wheels program in operation with the help of volunteers. I also noticed that many of the volunteers came from organizations. Since I was actively involved with the Woodland Kiwanis Club, I approached them first. I asked the membership if they would help as drivers if I were successful in getting a Community Care Car service started. Their response was an enthusiastic "yes". Roy Jones was my property manager and very active in the Woodland rotary Club. I asked him if he would solicit the Rotary membership for driver. Roy not only got many drivers from Rotary, but he became one of the first drivers himself!

George Bloom, who was working for me at the time, was one of my closet friends. Looking back, I believe the only reason George was with me was that God sent him to help me. I don't know why I was so lucky to have a person like George. Upon my request, he went to AARP and received their assurances that they would also help as drivers. Whenever I state that "I" did this or "I" did that, George was usually with me. He was retired at the time and he devoted countless hours doing whatever was necessary to establish and operate the transportation system.

We also received support from the Woodland Soroptimist Club when we requested their help as drivers. We particularly needed drivers for Sundays so senior citizens could attend the church of their choice. We had only to take this problem to the Woodland Soroptimist club to have it solved. They said they would drive and they continued to drive the van for many years.

I really didn't have a doubt that we would get it started. How can you fail when you knew that it would help so many people. It was also very clear that there were many other items needed: i.e., a van, insurance, more volunteers, fuel for the van, an attorney to incorporate the system, an office to receive calls, and a bookkeeping system, to name a few.

I realized that if I got the bureaucracy involved, I would not be able to proceed in a timely manner and the organization would lose its personal touch. I saw what happened when the Meals On Wheels program went from the volunteers to an impersonal organization. It was never the same again. I didn't want this to happen with the transportation system. I also found very quickly that senior citizens didn't want charity. They could take care of themselves if they were given the opportunity with just a minimum of help. They also taught me that if I wanted to know their needs and how to solve them, I needed only to ask them! So I asked and asked. They advised and advised!

I decided the only way that senior citizens could be sure the organization would operate the way they wanted was to have them own it. Consequently, I developed the system without the investment of any city, county, state, or federal funds. No public funds insured that the senior citizens would own 100% of it. I have been advised that the Associated Press announced nationally that it was the first of its kind that was established without the use of tax money of any kind.

I went to Harold Ford who was a good friend of mine and an excellent attorney. I asked him if he would start the process of incorporation and of course he did a fine job. I only needed to inform him of a few details such as the need for the senior citizens to own it. I told him that the transportation system was for any retired person who was 55 years or older or any mentally or physically handicapped person of any age. I told him there would not be any charge for the transportation and that it was to be used for any important appointment. In a couple of years we dropped the mentally and physically handicapped because the sheltered workshop obtained their own van. I don't remember who named the transportation system the Community Care Car.

The Van

I noticed cars being used for drivers training so I went to many auto dealers and told them what I wanted to do and that I was looking for a van that would be donated. I informed them that we would place the donor's name on it. I went to many car dealers in both woodland and Davis. I finally spoke to Al Harter who was the owner of Harter Volkswagen in Davis. He stated that he would lie to help and gave us a van to use for one year. I called another close friend, Charles Hoecker, owner of "signs by Heck." I told Charley what I was doing and asked if he would design a sign to put on the van. Charles is an artist. He did a beautiful job. Charles is still actively involved with the CCC.

At the end of the first year, I went to Al Harter and told him the only way the senior citizens could really thank him was to order a new van with the condition that there would not be a discount on the price. While on the way home from Davis, George Bloom asked me how I was going to pay for it, and I remember stating that I didn't have the slightest idea. I went to Ed Leak, the owner of the Woodland Daily Democrat, and told him I wanted to put an ad in the paper to inform people that I was looking for donations to pay for the new CCC van. He said he would do better than just an ad. He put my request on the front page under the banner, "Lawson Is Looking For Donations For The Community Care Car." A friend of mine who owns a large farming operation walked into my office and stated, "Jim, I see that you are looking for donations for the CCC. Hers is a check to help you get started in you fund raising." It was a check for

\$9,000. The total bill for the van was \$11,000. I believe we received \$27,000 within three days! We used the balance of the funds to operate the van for several years. Thanks to Ken Leak for allowing me to get the word out!

Donations for Gas

We soon realized that we needed help from someone who could help us obtain volunteers, take care of the books, and do whatever was necessary. I needed another person like George Bloom. It was no surprise that George recruited Chris Christianson who was a good friend of his. I soon found that Chris was one special person. I can't say enough about him. He did so much. I don't know how we could have possibly gotten the CCC off its feet and running if it wasn't for him. We asked gas stations to donate a tank of gas a week. The response was fantastic. Ed Dinova of the Woodland Car Wash volunteered to have the van washed weekly at no cost. He continues to wash the van free of charge on a weekly basis to this day.

George and Chris were constantly asking people to volunteer. This is the reason we obtained so many volunteers and were able to get the CCC off and running from the very start.

The Office (Phone System)

It became imperative that I obtain an office where we could set up a phone system where people who needed transportation could call in the day before and we could schedule it. I copied Bill Duay's Meals On Wheels phone system. I first installed it in the basement of St. John's Church. I didn't want anyone to know where we placed it because Bill had a problem when people discovered that the minister of the St. John's Church founded Meals on Wheels. Some people thought it was for protestants only or limited to the members of his church. I was concerned that this confusion would occur again so we kept the phone location a secret.

After the CCC was in operation for a few months, I went to the Woodland fire Department to see if they could help. I spoke to a good friend of mine, Pat Spies. I told her we needed to find another office for our phone and I asked if she could help out since she was in charge of the switchboard. She really liked the idea and told me she would do what she could. I knew the fire department had someone on duty answering the phone 24 hours a day. I wanted to place a phone on the front desk so the person on duty could answer the phone and write the information on a schedule sheet. They agreed, thanks to Pat. She did a great job. I know I could not have accomplished the agreement with the fire department without her. The fire department also made

financial donations to the sheltered workshop. In my opinion, of all the fine Woodland departments, the fire department is at the top of the list!

I realized that we couldn't have the phone system at the fire department forever. We were in operation there for some time when John Suhr, Director of the Woodland Parks and Recreation Department, volunteered to place the phone system in his office. It's important to note that John was not asked, but heard of our need and solved our problem. The phone system stayed at the Parks and Recreation office until the Senior Citizen Center was established. The CCC operation was moved to the Senior Citizen Center and it remains there to this day. John Suhr was also the person who set up the phones at the Center and obtained the required personnel.

Insurance

Obtaining insurance to cover the van was imperative so I went to a close friend, Jerry Ernst. He was the owner of a large insurance agency, L. E. Wraith and Associates. I asked Jerry to help me obtain insurance for the CCC and he was more than willing. When the majority of the drivers are senior citizens and the recipients are senior citizens, one can appreciate that it was not easy for Jerry. However, he came through with an insurance policy to cover the CCC corporation. He obtained the best rate possible, but it was very expensive. If I were going to keep the CCC a free transportation system without the use of public funds, I realized I had to think of a way to raise the money for the insurance. When I learned that AARP took special trips to the casinos in Nevada where the casinos gave them back their cost of transportation, I thought I might have the answer. We went to the AARP and asked if they would give CCC the refunds they received back from the casinos and they agreed! The Nevada casinos paid for the CCC insurance for many years! The City of Woodland is presently paying for it.

According to Elise Hickey, CCC Treasurer for many years and an outstanding volunteer, we have transported more than 60,000 people within a mile radius of Woodland to date. We currently have two vans and 97 volunteers.

Notes of Interest

I was speaking to an elderly woman during the first few months of the CCC and she complained how difficult it was to go anywhere since she suffered from arthritis. She couldn't drive anymore. I asked why she didn't use the CCC and she stated that she does not take charity. I told her it was not charity and that there was a bucket in the van so people could pay for the gas if they wished. I immediately called the CCC office

and asked them to put a bucket in the van and mark it, "Pay for gas if you wish." Now you know how we came up with the bucket in the van!

I received a phone call from a local convalescent hospital and they advised me that they had patients who waited for family members to come and take them for an hour's drive and they fail to show up. They asked if there was anything we could do. We were very busy every day except Saturdays so we contacted other convalescent hospitals and found they had the same problem. When we went to the hospital the first Saturday, we asked the patients where they would like to go and they said the cemetery to visit their loved ones. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life. On the way back to the hospital, one of the patients was very upset. I asked her why and she stated that it was the first time she had been out of the convalescent hospital in ten years. We discovered that those who didn't have loved ones never had an opportunity to leave the hospital. Therefore, we created a schedule so that all of the patients, who were able, could go for an hour's drive. Incidentally, those who were not physically able to ride were not forgotten. I enlisted the help of many senior citizens and organized the volunteer visitors. Members of this organization visited those who were unable to leave or didn't regularly receive visitors. A special recognition should go to Audrey Methvin. It would not have been possible to keep the volunteer visitors going without her.

The Cancer Society contacted me and stated they did not receive enough funds to take cancer patients from Woodland to Sacramento for cobalt treatments. We agreed to transport their patients until the Cancer Society obtain enough funds. This was the only time the CCC went over the one—mile radius of Woodland. We helped for approximately 9 months.

Was It Worth It?

I had the pleasure of receiving a plaque of appreciation from the AARP for being the founder of the CCC. I was also the honored guest at a luncheon which was attended by over 200 senior citizens in the City of Woodland where I received a beautiful briefcase. The most touching honor I have ever received, or any son could ever receive, occurred at this luncheon when the audience of senior citizens gave my mother a standing ovation. I'll always be greatly to those who helped me in so many ways. You bet it was worth it!