

ITNSt.Charles

Keeping Seniors Mobile

Story by Linda Buschman

According to a recent study by the Independent Transportation Network (ITN), Americans may outlive their ability to drive safely by six to ten years. Many older adults don't recognize the changes in their driving skills until it is too late. They want to maintain the freedom, flexibility and independence that operating their own vehicle affords. But, sadly, some become safety statistics before they realize that they should have made changes in their driving habits sooner rather than later. Americans are living longer and there will continue to be more issues dealing with transportation for seniors.

So, what are the safe alternatives when a senior has to give up their vehicle?

ITNAmerica is the first national non-profit organization providing transportation services for America's aging population. The organization provides dignified, community-based and community-supported transportation solutions for seniors. The ITN model mobilizes grassroots support to provide sustainable and efficient transportation services for seniors and their families. Through their services, ITN successfully replicates the freedom, flexibility and independence that driver's desire.

As an affiliate of ITNAmerica, ITNSt.Charles is addressing these issues for seniors living in St. Charles County. Through careful planning and partnerships with local groups of volunteers, they are making strategic decisions and providing essential solutions for community transportation.

Althea West is the Executive Director of ITNSt.Charles. West says that ITNSt.Charles "serves St. Charles County residents and goes anywhere, anytime for any reason." "We offer door through door, arm in arm service," West said.

ITNSt.Charles began serving seniors in April 2010, and currently provides approximately 250 rides per month to more than 80 seniors across the County. Anyone over the age of 65, or anyone



21 and older living with a disability is qualified to use ITNSt.Charles services.

West, who holds a Masters in Gerontology, has focused her career on providing independence for seniors. She believes the issue of transportation is the number one trigger in elder care needs. It affects the social, physical and mental needs of a person and can greatly affect a senior's quality of life. "Our goal is to provide a service that can keep them (seniors) in their homes. They can continue to contribute to the community in which they live," stated West.

The organization relies heavily on volunteer drivers to meet the needs of riders. Each volunteer is screened, must provide their own vehicle and proof of insurance. Volunteer drivers build credits for their own use, and may also choose to donate their credits to other members. The organization currently has 22 volunteer drivers with a goal of 50 in another year. The more volunteers they have, the more rides they can provide.

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One way the organization partners with the community for volunteers is by working with local groups and churches. New Hope Presbyterian Church is one great example. The church enrolled as a member and provides volunteer drivers for ITNSt.Charles. The hours that the volunteers drive are banked into an account and then the church makes the banked hours available to seniors in the congregation. This creates a win-win situation for the church and ITNSt.Charles. The church is able to provide this vital service to seniors in its congregation. And ITNSt.Charles has a group of dedicated volunteer drivers.

Another partnership ITNSt.Charles has formed is with Breeze Park Lutheran Senior Services. As the Premier Sponsor, Breeze Park provides vital resources as ITNSt.Charles moves toward self-sustainability.

So why join ITNSt.Charles? "ITNSt.Charles provides an affordable and safe alternative to burdening loved ones," said West. "It gives peace of mind for family members knowing their loved one is in safe hands."

ITN offers services 7 days a week, 24 hours a day...bringing safer roads for all.

If you are a senior or an adult living with a disability, you don't have to give up anything. You still have places to go, people to see and things you want to do. Now you can enroll in ITN, set up a pre-paid account, schedule a ride and get on with your life!

Visit www.ITNStCharles.org or call 636-329-0888 for more information!

