

## Seniors

### Around Town Driving Program

By Jennifer Wake

*Unique Driving Program Helps Take "Seniors Around Town"*

As a senior, losing your ability to drive can be devastating, says Orinda Association President Kate Wiley, especially when you live in Lamorinda. So when the City of Orinda received funding from the Southwest Transportation Demand Management Program in 2003 to create a city-wide rideshare program, Wiley saw a way to make a difference.

"We already had a casual rideshare program for adults," Wiley said. "What we needed was transportation for seniors."

Wiley helped rewrite the intent of a \$35,000 grant to create Seniors Around Town (SAT) – a program exclusively for Orinda seniors who are no longer able to drive and who may not qualify for the County Connection LINK system. Volunteer drivers offer transportation to the Lamorinda, Berkeley and Walnut Creek areas from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Thanks to help from Contra Costa County Supervisor Gayle Uilkema, the program, which is run through the Orinda Association office, offers volunteer drivers an easy and cost-free way to help their neighbors. Fees are waived for fingerprinting and background checks, and DMV paperwork can be handled via the mail.

Current SAT coordinator Eartha Newsong says the program offers convenience, comfort and camaraderie. "These are seniors who have lived here for many, many years and are not eligible for LINK," she said. "But even LINK picks up others and often the schedules are at difficult times. With our program, [riders] are in a personal car on their own schedule and friendships develop."

Retired nurse Rosie Heim of Orinda has been a driver for more than a year, and says the program feels "almost like a friend calling to say they need a ride."

"One or two of the riders I've gotten to be friends with and I'll drive them to appointments," Heim said. "Since our kids grew up here and went to the same schools, we chit-chat about that." She only wishes she could drive more.

To keep them from getting overwhelmed, Newsong rotates drivers regularly. "I try not to call them more than once a month," she said.

What started as a program with only six drivers now has a total of 27, with six more pending, and 72 Orinda residents are registered as riders. The program averages 44 trips to and from appointments each month, and drivers and riders are screened prior to their participation. Unfortunately, some like those in wheelchairs cannot participate.

"We worked with several registered nurses to understand the senior population and the needs of our clients," Wiley explained. "We slowly worked it up to what we have today."

For Heim, the program is "a nice thing to have in your back pocket."

"As a resident of Orinda, I don't know what I'd do if I didn't drive," she said. "It's a panicky feeling."

To learn more about the Seniors Around Town program, visit the Orinda Association Web site at:

[www.orindaassociation.org](http://www.orindaassociation.org).

#### Classic Car Show Benefits

#### Senior Rideshare Program

On Saturday, Sept. 8, Orinda Motors will be holding its 3rd Annual Orinda Classic Car Show to benefit the Seniors Around Town program. The event is free from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Orinda Village at Orinda Motors (63 Orinda Way), but if you make a donation of \$25 you will have an opportunity to ride in one of the cars – including American and European cars ranging from the 1920's, to the classics of the 50's and 60's, as well as modern exotics – during the parade at the close of the show.

Raffle prizes include a chance to win race laps with 24hr Daytona winner and Orinda resident, Jochen Rohr, at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma on Saturday, Oct. 27. Jochen will be signing racing posters at the event, which is sponsored by Orinda Motors, Capture Technologies, The Mechanics Bank, Village Associates Real Estate, and the Orinda Fed Ex Kinkos.



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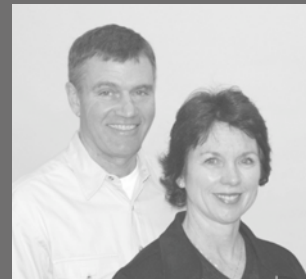
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