

Published June 27th, 2018

## Lamorinda Spirit Van celebrates 12 years of service to seniors

By Pippa Fisher



Eddie Carvalho with the 2009 Lunch Bunch.  
Photo provided

errands, classes, exercise, physical therapy, social occasions, lunch at the C.C. Café, and a few mini-day trips to local places of interest," says Bruns.

Bruns explains that she was hired by the city in mid-May 2006 to set up and operate the program as well as to keep it funded.

"The previous Senior Services Coordinator, Mei Sun Li, met with Tighe Boyle and Paul Branson from the county and indicated that yes, older adults in Lamorinda needed transportation options once they could no longer drive. She set up community focus groups, and the public validated this need," explains Bruns.

Using a donated County Connection used vehicle and with funding from the city of Lafayette and the East Bay Community Foundation, and with support from the town of Moraga and the city of Orinda, the program was born.

Bruns says that the program hired its lunch driver, Eddie Carvalho, shortly thereafter.

"Mei Sun Li recruited three volunteer drivers who were later trained by the County Connection so that we could offer rides to errands and grocery shopping three afternoons a week," says Bruns.

Carvalho still drives for Spirit today. They now have an additional staff driver, Bob Kelly, who drives for some community events.

Bruns oversees funding, applying for grants as well as scheduling the drivers, ensuring the vans are serviced, recruiting and training of volunteers and for the dispatch paid staff. "Dispatch communicates with the passengers, schedules the next day's rides, and collects data for grant reports. Dispatch is a shared position among four people - each working one or two afternoons a week."

Bruns says she is truly grateful for the community support without which the program would not exist, referring to their funding from the city of Lafayette, Contra Costa Community Development Block Grant, the County Connection, the Lamorinda Movers, the Lafayette Community Foundation, the Moraga Juniors and the Orinda Woman's Club, as well as passenger fares and individual donations.

The Lamorinda Spirit Van will be taking passengers to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk on Saturday, June 30 and to John Muir Woods on Saturday, July 28. Bruns says that anyone interested in joining the fun should call (925) 283-3534 for details.

Currently the program has 11 volunteer drivers and Bruns says she is very grateful for them but adds that ideally she would like to have 20. Each volunteer generally drives one four-hour shift a week in the morning or afternoon. Bruns explains that the program now has two mini-vans, a nine-passenger vehicle and a 12-passenger vehicle funded through the 5310 Federal Grant program. "With additional volunteer drivers, we could have two vehicles at a time out serving the community when there is high demand."

Any residents interested in volunteering should contact Bruns at [mbruns@ci.lafayette.ca.us](mailto:mbruns@ci.lafayette.ca.us) or call (925) 283-3534. It is a volunteer service greatly appreciated by those who would otherwise be unable to leave their homes.

This month sees the 12th anniversary of the Lamorinda Spirit Van. It is a remarkable achievement for any program but perhaps even more so in this case since the program is mostly operated by volunteers and is largely grant-reliant. The program is looking for additional volunteer drivers.

Program Director Mary Bruns says the Lamorinda Spirit Van gave its first ride on June 19, 2006 to the C. C. Café at the Walnut Creek Senior Center. The Spirit program serves adults age 60 and up who live in Lamorinda, although Bruns says most passengers are in their 80s and 90s and may have age-based disabilities.

"Some use canes and walkers; a few are in wheelchairs. Some have macular degeneration, which doesn't allow them to drive. We take people to destinations in Lamorinda, Concord, Martinez, Pleasant Hill, and Walnut Creek. We provide rides Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to medical and personal appointments, grocery/sundry shopping,

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