



enjoying a walk

Photo Wendy Scheck



Carl Tonini of Moraga enjoying a trip to OSH for 4th of July decorations Photo Andy Scheck

## Seniors Help Seniors Stay Independent Longer

By Jean Follmer

Orinda and Thursdays in Moraga from 2pm-5pm. The Spirit Van also offers occasional trips to the mall and the movies and is trying to coordinate with some of the senior programs at the Lafayette Community Center. Although the Spirit Van is primarily funded by the City of Lafayette, the services are available to all Lamorinda seniors. Other funding sources include organizations like the Moraga Junior Women's Club. Senior Transportation Coordinator Mary Bruns said the Moraga Junior Women's Club generously "donated 50% of the money they raised in their garden tour. They were a delight to work with." The Spirit Van is driven by trained volunteers who offer a "through the door program" like helping seniors into their homes with packages. Bruns said they had anticipated purchasing a second van this fall with funds from Contra Costa County, but "due to California budget cuts," that isn't going to happen. Bruns hopes to secure a second van from donations. She stressed "We always need more drivers and we always need more funding." Seniors who take the Spirit Van have found they enjoy the camaraderie of it. One rider told Bruns he was "sitting home reading all the time and started going to the lunch program. He's glad he's not so isolated now." Contact the Lamorinda Spirit Van at 283-3534 or MBruns@lovelafayette.org.

For those seniors who would like a little more assistance or are unable to pay for a cab or van fare, there is the Volunteer Driver Program. Senior Helpline Services Rides for Seniors offers free ride service to qualifying seniors age sixty and up throughout Contra Costa County. Senior Helpline Services Executive Director Elaine Welch said "Our motto is to help seniors age in place safely and comfortably." The ride program is one of three services provided by Senior Helpline Services. The others are phone assistance and home safety education programs. The ride

program currently includes 106 drivers and 180 riders. Welch said there is a "big presence of both drivers and clients in Lamorinda." The program enables seniors to receive help on a personal and individual level. The driver will not only drive them to a doctor appointment, but will remain in the waiting room during the appointment and return them to their home. Welch said the entity "largely grew out of my experience as a nurse." She saw seniors entering nursing facilities who really didn't need to be there except for loss of transportation. She said many seniors are "independent inside the door but have lost their mobility" outside of the home. She regrets that it has "somehow seemed to go unnoticed that it's become okay to place seniors in facilities simply because they've lost mobility." Welch said "I'm dedicating the rest of my life to helping seniors age in place." The Rides for Seniors program "gives riders a lift," both literally and emotionally. To volunteer, call Janice at 284-6699. For ride information, call Laurie at 284-6161.

Orinda Seniors Around Town (SAT) offers a free volunteer driver program to Orinda residents. Sponsored by the City of Orinda and the Orinda Association, SAT coordinator Eartha Newsong said they have twenty four drivers and two pending drivers. They currently have eighty five registered riders and thirty five of them are regulars. The numbers of rides given keeps increasing each year. Newsong said "So far this year through April we had already done 166 rides and 113 volunteer hours." Newsong said "We're always happy to accept new drivers." Administration costs are covered by generously donated proceeds from the Orinda Classic Car Show as well as a grant and other donations. For information on volunteering or riding, call 254-0800.

With these mobility options available to Lamorinda seniors, why don't you go ahead and plant that orange tree? You may be able to enjoy it for the rest of your life.



A supporting hand and a full size car, and two seniors can get to church on Sundays Photo Wendy Scheck

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