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Group helps to kick driving habit

By Betsy Clayton
Emerald Reporter

No one wants to quit driving. Giving it up can be one of the biggest sacrifices a person makes in his or her life. That's what 72-year-old Ethel Villeneuve thinks, and that's why she decided to form the Give Up Driving Support Group.

The group had its first meeting Oct. 8 at the Campbell Senior Center and Villeneuve said the room was "jammed." Its focus is helping each other get ready to make the choices necessary to give up driving.

Villeneuve said that giving

up driving isn't just an issue that affects elderly people. "I've had calls from people whose parents are still driving and they want to know how to get someone from behind the wheel," she explained.

Villeneuve said that the group is for all people, including younger relatives and young people in ill health who have to quit driving. "Sooner or later the issue will touch all of us, so we might as well plan for it now," she said.

Villeneuve is a retired Eugene social worker, and her decision to form the group was motivated by a recent accident caused by an elderly driver. A man entered an exit ramp of Interstate 105 from Coburg Road

and drove the wrong way on I-105 to Springfield.

"We all want to quit before we have accidents," she said, but she also pointed out that it's hard to see the alternatives.

"It seems like there is a support group for everything in the world, but this is an idea that I've never heard of before," Villeneuve explained. "Giving up driving is pure pain. You give up your last vestige of independence."

She thinks one possible way to make it better is to give up a little bit at a time. "The people entering exits on freeways should have given up freeway driving, but that doesn't mean they have to give up all driving," she said.

One woman at the meeting explained that she decides each day where she has to go and she then chooses what time she will do it. "That way there is less pressure on her and it's all planned out," Villeneuve said.

Most people who attended the meeting were between the ages of 55 and 65, and the most common questions were about the laws governing driving. "People don't know about the laws. There's a lot of misinformation," she said. Another common question was about what the Lane Transit District bus system has to offer and what people can expect from it.

"There was a lot of appreciation expressed for LTD," Villeneuve said, explaining that the group will be looking into other alternatives to driving. As of now, she cites taxi services, senior center vans for shopping, and a system that one business has set up so elderly people can order groceries from the home.

The group is planning a meeting every two weeks with speakers to discuss areas of concern. Villeneuve said they are looking for representatives from LTD and the Division of Motor Vehicles to speak, and she has also planned on having someone speak about the kind of language to use with friends who shouldn't be driving.

"But most important is to spend some time talking about our experiences, to support each other and to make choices," Villeneuve emphasized. "The idea of not having your keys makes you think you don't have control. Of course that's not true. The focus of our group is to help people feel in control."

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