

Veteran transport program renewed

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Last year Wallowa County veterans made more than 500 trips for medical care. Given the remoteness of the county and the vast distances they must travel, receiving assistance to afford those trips is essential.

Thanks to the Highly Rural Transportation Grant provided by the federal government, veterans in Wallowa County and nine other rural Oregon counties have received assistance that includes door-to-door pick-up and drop-off in ADA-compliant vehicles, along with assistance in loading or unloading at no cost to the veteran.

That grant provision, which has been renewed three years in the past, will continue, according to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The federal grant provides half a million dollars toward the transportation needs of veterans in rural Oregon. Oregon has 10 counties that are considered "highly rural": Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Lake, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa and Wheeler. Each county receives \$50,000, which the state VA, in partnership with each county or transportation district, leverages with existing programs in order to get the maximum value from each grant.



Chieftain Archives

A Wallowa County veteran enjoys a special position of honor at Wallowa's Fourth of July Parade. Veterans in Wallowa County are able to rely upon a transportation program through Community Connection that delivers veterans door to door for medical appointments.

"The success of this program really boils down to the creativity of these counties and transportation districts," said Mitch Sparks, director of statewide veterans' services for ODVA. "We didn't dictate to them how the money

should be spent. That allowed them to be very innovative in using these grants however they worked best within their individual transportation systems."

Last year, veterans in the 10 participating counties

made 5,453 trips spanning more than 274,600 miles as part of this program. Wallowa County veterans accounted for slightly less than 10 percent of those trips.

Jim Hicks of Joseph, current post commander for VFW Post 4307 in Enterprise, praised the veteran's transport program offered in Wallowa County through Community Connection.

"The program has been very good and we've had no problems with it," he said. "They've been there to take care of everyone who needed the program. I made one trip to American Lakes in Tacoma, a seven-and-a-half-hour drive one way. They picked me up, got me up there and picked me up at the hotel and got me to the doctor's appointment and stayed and waited until I was ready to go and picked me up and took me home. There are so many veterans that can't afford such a trip — it saves them a lot of money."

"Our need is actually higher than can be covered by the \$50,000 grant," said Connie Guentert, manager of Community Connection. "There were a couple of months last year we couldn't provide trips through this program because of the limit of the grant. We gave veterans a ride under a different program."

Oregon vets in rural areas account for nearly half of the total trips provided nationally under the program, according

to ODVA, because not all Veteran's Affairs offices in other states have taken advantage of the program. Only 25 states have any counties that qualify as "highly rural" and only 11 have applied for the program.

As a result, Oregon counties may be leading the way in demonstrating how best to use the grant.

"Representatives of the 10 Oregon counties meet twice a year to discuss what has worked and what veterans need," said Guentert. "We're creating a good path for other states to use and be successful with."

Mitch Sparks, director of statewide veterans services for ODVA, has high praise for the Wallowa County partnership.

"Community Connection in Wallowa County is very active and very creative in the ways they work to help veterans," Sparks said. "I am very impressed. We got them another \$10,000 through another program to help them with those extra trips not covered in the Highly Rural Transportation program last year. We're really proud to have Community Connection as a partner."

If you are a veteran and would like more information about the Highly Rural Transportation program, please contact Danielle Salmon at Community Connection at 541-426-3840.

World War II letter home

The following letter, dated Nov. 2, 1943, was submitted by Karen Mason of Joseph. It was written by her Father, Floyd Wilson, Jr. while he was recovering from shrapnel wounds and malaria in New Guinea. He was a machine gunner. The letter was reduced in size to fit in a 3 1/2 x 4 1/2 envelope.

Dear Daddy

I guess you will have to be satisfied this time with this kind of letter, but I suppose you will be glad to get it as has been some time since I last wrote. I just wrote Aunt Lucille and forgot to tell her how I was so will tell you before I forget this time. My leg is better, still hasn't completely healed, but is coming along in good shape, my first malaria treatment has been over quite some time so will probably get it again before too long so won't worry about it till it comes along.

I guess you know that Don sent a couple of dollar bills over to me when I really didn't need it, I have five hundred and eight dollars in five dollar bills so have a quite a pocket full of paper. I don't know where Don is at so guess won't write to him this time, sure have a hard time trying to keep up with him. Well Daddy will close for this time saying please don't worry so much. Hope to see you soon.

Your Son Floyd

Divide Camp open house Friday

Veterans Day moment of silence will be observed

Wallowa County Chieftain

On Oct. 7, President Barack Obama signed into law the Veterans Day Moment of Silence Act. It states "The President shall issue each year a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe two minutes of silence on Veterans Day in honor of the service and sacrifice of veterans throughout

the history of the Nation. ..."

Divide Camp Headquarters will be hosting an open house from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 11. The Veterans Day moment of silence will be observed at 11:11 a.m.

Divide Camp is a local nonprofit devoted to healing the physical and psychological injuries of post-9/11 veterans through outdoor pursuits.

"Military servicemen of all eras, active and retired, as well as their families are invited to enjoy refreshments," said HQ building manager Katherine Stickroth. "The public is also welcome to visit throughout the day."

During the open house, veterans will be invited to enter a drawing for free Divide Camp caps that will be awarded each hour.

While the camp located on The Divide serves as a base for outdoor activities during the summer, the Divide Camp Headquarters in Joseph, next to Community Bank, now has regular hours to serve veterans in the off-season:

- 1-3 p.m. Monday through Wednesday

- 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday through Saturday

Free coffee and snacks will be on hand, and a relaxed atmosphere for conversation, reading and games.

"We keep a current copy of The Chieftain and even have a cribbage table we hope veterans will use," Stickroth said.

"Members from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, other veteran organizations and the ladies auxiliaries of these groups — these are especially encouraged to attend the open house. This time, it's our turn to serve."

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