

Seniors face the facts of life

Ray Rideout is in his early 60s and retired.

He maintains an active lifestyle through various hobbies and activities, but he knows that as the years pass, that may all change.

That's why he volunteers at the Seniors Assisted Transportation Society of Greater Edmonton (SATS) as a driver.

"I'm watching how seniors are coping with losing their eyesight, mobility and dealing with being alone for a lot of the time.

"And yet most of them are still cheerful. We live in a society that doesn't talk about declining health and aging, yet it's a fact of life. My connection with the seniors in my life helps me confront it."



He explains how caring for his ailing mother-in-law – driving her to appointments and taking care of her shortly before she died – got him thinking.

"There has to be a lot of other people without relatives to drive them around," he says.

When he saw a poster from SATS seeking volunteer drivers, it was a natural fit for him.

Anna Der, executive director of SATS, hopes to recruit more volunteers to meet

Dignity is always the right answer

the growing demand for volunteer drivers.

"Transportation is vital to well-being," Der says.

With so many older, low-income, frail seniors lacking affordable transportation options, accessing basic needs like food and medicine becomes an everyday challenge.

The non-profit organization has been working hard to meet growing demands from the community, but Der admits times can be tough when more and more seniors are added to the waiting list.

Luckily, they've managed to cut down

the waiting list from 500 seniors to about 200 since early 2009, but that doesn't mean the need for volunteers has abated.

"Sometimes seniors end up waiting years for a driver," Der admits. "We have about 50 drivers, but we'd like to see that number at 100 so we can serve more seniors. That extra 50 could carry 300 more seniors."

To make the volunteer recruitment process easier for potential volunteers, SATS arranges for a security clearance and pays for a driver abstract that's needed to ensure volunteers are safe drivers.

In the event of an accident or if the volunteer is hurt, the organization has purchased coverage from the Workers' Compensation Board.

Der also adds that the organization hasn't had one single accident involving a senior in the vehicle since they opened in 2001.

Aside from a good driving record and adequate insurance, the only other requirement is that volunteers need to be 18 years and older.

It also helps to enjoy spending time with seniors.

Rideout mentions one of the seniors he drives and describes how he enjoys learning about her life growing up in South Africa, and the journey she made to Edmonton.

"These people have accumulated so much wisdom. I find it a privilege to drive her and talk with her," he says.

Der hopes to find others like Rideout who want to make a noticeable contribution to deserving seniors.

"You can really make an immediate difference," she emphasizes.

"You can feel it that day when you pick them up, take them to an appointment and take them home. They get their needs met because you've enabled it."

To learn about the Seniors Assisted Transportation Society of Greater Edmonton (SATS) and how to volunteer, visit their website at www.satsofedmonton.org or call 780-732-1221.

For story ideas, please contact Evelyn Pham, communications coordinator at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call (780) 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com.

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Anna Der

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