

CMC starts transport program

BY MAX SILVERSON

THE STAR-NEWS

Ken Shake sat comfortably in his wheelchair while he loaded into a van last week on his way to Cascade Medical Center.

The 99-year-old World War II veteran is one of about a dozen patients that have taken advantage of CMC's new transport van. The free service run by the clinic will take patients to and from their appointment if they need help.

Shake was the first patient to use the van's wheelchair capability, which includes a system of straps to make the trip safe.

The modified Chrysler Voyager minivan can fit up to seven people, or up to five if one is seated in a wheelchair.

"This is a godsend, and I think it sets a standard for the community for what we really need to offer our seniors," said Ken's son Larry Shake, who looks after his father at his home near McCall.

St. Luke's McCall is closer, but the family prefers traveling to CMC for medical care.

"I like the small hospital feel, and the service that we



Photo by Max Silversen/The Star-News

Ron Brown helps Ken Shake into the Cascade Medical Center's new transport van.

get out of a small hospital," Larry said.

Not least of those services is the van itself.

Larry had purchased a new pickup truck as a safer and more reliable means of transporting his father to appointments in the winter-time, but one slippery winter morning, his father almost fell getting into the truck.

The van is available to any patient needing to get

to CMC for non-emergency visits, or for any patients in Cascade that need to go to St. Luke's McCall to see a specialist.

"Anyone who needs it can use it. We don't have a screening questionnaire, if they say they need a ride, we give them a ride," said CMC CEO Tom Reinhardt. "The goal is to make sure transportation isn't a barrier

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to getting health care. We know other things might get in the way, but we know we can fix this one."

Some people need a ride because they have a disability and cannot drive. Others cannot afford the gas or a reliable vehicle. For others it is a seasonal issue and they are reluctant to drive in the winter due to road conditions. Some people need a ride home from the ER because EMS brought them to CMC but they need a ride back home.

CMC will expand the facility's lower parking lot this fall and plans to construct

a garage to store the van. A cost for that garage has not yet been confirmed.

The \$65,000 van was purchased with \$200,000 from the Rural Health Quality Improvement Grant Program funded by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration.

Grant funds cover the ongoing costs of the van like insurance, gas, maintenance and driver pay.

Ron Brown, 71, of Cascade is the primary driver, but CMC has 10 backup drivers who have completed training on how to operate the van.

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"I'm semi-retired, so, when a hospital needs someone to drive a patient in for an appointment, I go do that," said Brown, who previously drove school buses for Cascade Schools and is a current member of the Cascade City Council.

Brown thought it was a volunteer position when he signed up to "pay it forward," but he's happy to be paid for his efforts too.

"I just always tried to be involved in the community," he said. "If you're gonna live in the community, you should be involved in it."