



# NEWS RELEASE

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## Transportation program receives national recognition for innovation

GEORGETOWN COUNTY, S.C. — Throughout Georgetown, Horry and Williamsburg counties, elderly and disabled residents are able to get to medical appointments, make trips to the pharmacy and grocery store, attend worship services and reach other destinations important to their daily lives thanks to a program offered through the Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments.

Known as Assisted Rides, the program is offered by the council's Aging and Disability Resource Center, and uses volunteers to help clients get where they need to go. This approach to helping special populations continue to live independently in their own homes instead of moving into assisted living facilities has earned Waccamaw Regional national recognition as a recipient of the 2014 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations. Award winners were showcased during the Association's annual training conference in Denver, Colorado. Waccamaw Regional executive director Sarah Smith was on hand to accept the recognition and talk about the program with other development organizations from around the country.

"Innovation is something that we and similar organizations prize, because as funding dwindles, we have to be more creative to serve more people," Smith said. "We have to come up with new programs delivered with volunteer assistance to meet the demands of the communities we serve."

The Assisted Rides program was introduced in January 2013 and has since then, with 74 volunteer drivers, provided more than 7,100 rides totaling more than 538,000 miles. More than 16 partnerships have been developed to increase awareness, screen riders, access software and promote the program throughout the region.

The program offers transportation to adults age 60 and up or age 21 and up for individuals with disabilities. Volunteer drivers are recruited and screened by Waccamaw Regional staff, and agree to provide transportation in their own privately-insured vehicles to those who qualify for assistance. A mobility manager provided through Waccamaw Regional uses Ride Scheduler, a low-cost web-based software program, to match riders with drivers and track data. The software is instrumental to the program's success, as it helps make the program affordable, accomplishing tasks that would otherwise require several staff members.

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"This program is a wonderful benefit to our community, because we have so many seniors and people with disabilities in need who don't have access to transportation, especially in the rural areas of our region," Smith said. "This is a low-cost means to give them that access."

One of the best things about the program is that it has the added benefit of providing human contact for residents who, in many cases, need and value that as much as the rides they request, Smith said. "They're also getting a chance to have a conversation with somebody and have somebody listen. It gives them somebody who cares, and means somebody is checking on them on a regular basis."

Waccamaw Regional and its Aging and Disability Resource Center are committed to long-term growth of the program, and Smith said she hopes this award will lead to the program's replication in communities around the nation.

For the last 28 years, the National Association of Development Organizations has recognized regional development organizations for their hard work and commitment to promoting economic development in rural and small metropolitan communities across the country.

"Award recipients have created innovative solutions that build on the unique strengths and challenges of their regions, all while continuing to promote sustainable economic growth, not only now, but for many years to come," said association president Peter Gregory.

The association promotes programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery and comprehensive strategies. The association's Innovation Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and partnering organizations for improving the economic and community competitiveness of the nation's regions and local communities.

For more information about the Assisted Rides program or Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments, visit [www.wrcog.org](http://www.wrcog.org), or contact Trina Cason, mobility manager, at (843) 436-2110 or [tcason@wrcog.org](mailto:tcason@wrcog.org). Volunteers for the program are always needed.

### **Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments**

Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments is an agency that offers regional programming and governmental services in Georgetown, Horry and Williamsburg counties of northeastern South Carolina. Created by the state legislature in the late 1960s, its mission is to support local governments in the region and develop effective partnerships that foster efficient transportation systems, economic and workforce development and allow the region's seniors to age in place. Visit [wrcog.org](http://wrcog.org) for more information.

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