



WACCAMAW REVIEW

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Grants available for home caregivers; learn who is eligible and how to apply!

Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments has funds available to assist unpaid caregivers within the agency's tri-county region. Those funds may be available to children caring for elderly parents, people caring for spouses with disabilities, or virtually any person in Georgetown, Horry or Williamsburg counties who devotes their free time and energy to caring for a loved one.

Many of those who qualify would never think of themselves as eligible for grants, staff with the program said. Caregivers



may feel taking care of their loved one is their duty due to blood ties, marriage vows or affection for the person being cared for, and that they shouldn't be compensated for it. However, these individuals *are* eligible and shouldn't be afraid to ask for help, which Waccamaw Regional

is able to provide, staff said.

Caregivers for individuals with disabilities, the elderly, or those with Alzheimer's disease, may qualify for a grant of \$500

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Assisted Rides program helps those in need get where they need to go

As mobility manager for Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments and coordinator of the agency's award-winning Assisted Rides program, Trina Cason talks to a lot of people. In fact, her phone seems to ring at all hours of the day and night, as residents in three counties try to arrange transportation to locations ranging from church to life-saving medical appointments.

On one recent morning the first call came in before dawn. It was a veteran in need of a ride to the Veterans Affairs Hospital for an appointment that day.

On average, Cason schedules about 500 rides a month through the program, which utilizes volunteer drivers. To qualify for Assisted Rides, a person must reside in the Waccamaw region (comprised of Georgetown, Horry and Williamsburg counties), have a disability that prevents them from driving, and be between the ages of 21 and 59. Those 60 and older may also qualify, but only if they are not already receiving or eligible to receive another transportation service.

Assisted Rides is not intended to be a substitute for any existing means of

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Assisted Rides passenger Andrew Nelson, right, and volunteer driver Michael Sparkman.

Experts offer regional economic outlook at WRCOG forum

S.C. Secretary of Commerce is keynote speaker

A regional approach is imperative if South Carolina wants to meet its economic goals and continue attracting new business, according to South Carolina's Secretary of Commerce, Robert "Bobby" M. Hitt III.

Hitt was the keynote speaker at a Regional Economic Outlook Forum hosted by Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments. The forum, held in Litchfield on March 26, attracted about 100 people, including business leaders and government officials from throughout Georgetown, Horry and Williamsburg counties.

"Companies don't locate in states. They locate in communities. They locate because of you," Hitt told the crowd, explaining the importance of their role in the economic success of their state, their region and their county. "Our job is to come here and support you."

He encouraged local governments to make investments now to help them land new businesses and create new jobs in the future. That includes investments in infrastructure, construction of spec buildings and more to ensure communities are ready for a new business to move right in. If one prospective community isn't ready, another will be and that's where businesses will locate, he said.

"They won't wait on you anymore. Either you're ready or you lose out," Hitt said. He told government officials he understands that investment in infrastructure and brick and mortar without a guaranteed tenant often don't play well with the public, but it pays off in the long run. For example, he said, Sumter County's investment in what critics called a "sewer line to nowhere" led to the opening of a Continental Tire plant there. "This is what it takes to win companies."

The state has successfully diversified its economy, he said. Whereas 20 years



About 100 people attended the forum on March 26 at Litchfield Beach and Golf Resort.

ago it relied on tourism and farming, South Carolina has added aerospace, automotive and pharmaceuticals into the mix. And once businesses are here, they want to stay here and grow here, he added. About 70 percent of growth since 2011 has come from expansion of businesses that already have a presence here. But new growth has been coming too. Last year the Palmetto State attracted \$5.1 billion in investment and 19,000 jobs, and 50 percent of growth was from businesses new to the state.

Innovation and high tech businesses are also part of South Carolina's future and are a focus for economic development across the state and in the Waccamaw Region, Hitt said. He was responsible for opening an Office of Innovation within the S.C. Department of Commerce two years ago. That venture has since lent support to ventures such as Startup.SC in Georgetown County, which nurtures and helps develop technology-based startups in the Waccamaw region.

In short, Hitt said the economic outlook for the state is bright, but communities need to continue focusing on developing inventory and infrastructure to attract companies and see potential for job and economic growth become reality.

The economic outlook forum also

included forecasts from other experts, including Dr. Rob Salvino, a research economist with Coastal Carolina University, and Richard Kaglic, senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Va. They offered positive projections for the nation, the state and the Waccamaw Region in particular, pointing to indicators including consumer spending, employment figures, real estate sales and more.

Salvino projected growth similar to last year as the national economic recovery continues. The Waccamaw region added 4,726 jobs in 2014 including 3,333 in Horry County, 998 in Georgetown County and 395 in Williamsburg County, he said. The number of single family home permits increased 18 percent, while median home prices went up 5.6 percent. Median household income remained flat, but retail sales increased by 5.6 percent (\$620 million) and tourism revenue rose by 5.2 percent. College enrollment figures continue to rise and tonnage at the Georgetown Port is growing as well.

Kaglic said he expects to see more robust economic growth in 2015 due to increasing consumer spending. A lack of spending by consumers is one reason economic recovery has taken place as slowly as it has thus far.

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8th annual Sports Classic makes exciting day for seniors

Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments' Area Agency on Aging had its eighth annual Waccamaw Sports Classic on April 10 at Coastal Carolina University. The event was attended by about 450 people, including senior athletes and participants, sponsors, volunteers and the event planning team.

A free, day-long event for senior citizens from across Georgetown, Horry, and Williamsburg counties, the Sports Classic included friendly sporting competitions, educational sessions and social programs. Students from the university led sports programs including track and field, corn hole, pickleball, spin casting and much more.

In addition to the benefits for seniors, the implementation of a Sports Classic program in the Waccamaw region strengthens the area's programming for older adults. Through this event, community service groups, volunteers and sponsoring organizations/corporations work together to plan for and actively promote healthy aging for all seniors.

The Waccamaw Sports Classic is the result of a community partnership between Horry County Parks and Recreation, Georgetown County Parks and Recreation, Coastal Carolina University, Tidelands Health, Conway Medical Center, Agape, the Horry County Council on Aging, Strand Orthopedics, Carolina Orthopedics, Vital Aging of Williamsburg County, Georgetown Bureau of Aging Services, Williamsburg County Parks and Recreation, and Waccamaw Regional. The games are sanctioned by the S.C. Senior Sports Classic and National Senior Games



Above: Seniors play pickleball during the Waccamaw Sports Classic at Coastal Carolina University on April 10. Right: a six-time medal winner for the day shows off at the games.



Association. The mission of the partnership is to promote physical fitness among the tri-county region's senior population.

Job fair connects employment seekers with work

Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments recently partnered with Goodwill, the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce, the Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce and the North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce to provide two annual job fairs for the region.

On Feb. 26, a job fair took place at the Myrtle Beach Mall, and on March 5 another took place at Inlet Square Mall. The job fairs were promoted and produced by partnering programs including Palmetto Goodwill, Waccamaw Regional, the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce, the Department of Social Services, Inlet Square Mall and Myrtle Beach Mall.

Committee members representing Waccamaw Regional were Rusty Gaskins, Ayla Hemeon, and Kerri Kellahan. Workshops on résumés, how to dress for success and interview techniques were provided by staff from Waccamaw Regional and the Department of Employment and Workforce. Facilitators for workshops in-



Jared Denz, Tony Johnson, Kim Burke and Scott Perez of the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce are pictured during a recent job fair.

cluded Kenneth McIver. Brandon Brown was also available to recruit for youth and adult services.

This was the fourth consecutive year for the Myrtle Beach Mall job fair and the second for fair at Inlet Square Mall.

Caregiver funding

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or more, depending on need and available funding. Grants may be used for respite care or reimbursement for items such as incontinence products or home modifications to accommodate individuals who have disabilities.

Funds are also available to help seniors 55 and older who serve as the primary caregiver for a child — such as a grandchild — with respite care and expenses related to the child's care.

"Being a caregiver is a tough job. Typically, caregivers are juggling work and other family obligations with their responsibilities as a caregiver and it can be overwhelming," said Valerie Gonzalez, a family caregiver advocate for Waccamaw Regional's office of Aging and Disability.

The office has a range of resources available for caregivers, including training, support groups and financial assistance. Gonzalez regularly deals with caregivers who might never get a break if not for the respite care funds made available through Waccamaw Regional. Respite care is paid care — in or out of the home — that enables a primary unpaid caregiver to be temporarily relieved of responsibilities. Many people don't understand how important respite care is until they

have been a caregiver.

"Being a caregiver can be a 24/7 job," Gonzalez said. For someone who has been diagnosed with an illness such as dementia and who has reached the stage where they can't be alone, caregivers have to be constantly vigilant. Patients with dementias, such as Alzheimer's disease, may wander off and become disoriented and lost if left unsupervised, or could be seriously injured attempting to do something that was once a daily activity, such as cooking or driving.

"Caregivers need a little 'me time' sometimes and respite care gives them that," Gonzalez said. "Maybe they just want to go to church on Sunday or to the beach one day. Other people use it for appointments or errands. Maybe they even just need a chance to get some sleep."

Unpaid caregivers of any age may qualify for respite care funding if the person they provide care for has Alzheimer's disease, is disabled, or is 60 and older and requires assistance with daily activities such as eating, dressing, bathing and going to the bathroom.

Those interested in receiving respite care grants must contact Waccamaw Regional's family caregiver program staff. The Alzheimer's respite program requires the caregiver to complete the

first two pages of a three-page application, while the last page is completed by a physician and confirms the patient's condition and need for care. Other applicants will also need to participate in a new client assessment with one of Waccamaw Regional's family caregiver advocates. This step will help determine the extent of assistance needed and if there are any other services provided by Waccamaw Regional that the client may be eligible for.

Seniors who are age 55 and older may qualify for assistance if they are the primary guardian or caregiver of a child or adult (age 19-59) who is disabled. The child or disabled adult can be a relative, including a grandchild. However, caregivers do not qualify for this type of assistance if they are the biological parent of the person they are caring for. Assistance available may include reimbursement for expenses related to care of the individual. Some form of proof that the applicant is the child's caregiver (such as guardianship documents or school records) must be provided in order for applications to be considered.

For more information, contact Valerie Gonzalez or Mary Ann Dybzinski, Waccamaw Regional family caregiver advocates, at (843) 546-8502.

Economic Outlook Forum

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"Consumer confidence is on the way up. We're at the highest levels of consumer confidence since before 2007 when the recession got started," Kaglic said. "One reason is there has been a tremendous restoration of wealth. We lost \$11 trillion in wealth and have since regained all of it, at least in nominal terms of net wealth for the nation."

The forum also saw informational presentations from Mike Wooten, vice chairman of the S.C. Department of Transportation Commission, and Kirk Lovell, assistant director of airports at the Myrtle Beach International Airport. Wooten touched on financial challenges being faced on a state and national level in regard to maintenance of roadways and bridges. He also discussed a 1 percent increase in the state sales tax on gasoline as a possible solution. Lovell discussed changes in the airline industry and

effects on the Myrtle Beach area specifically.

The forum is an annual event and was sponsored by Waccamaw Regional's Economic Outlook Board, with support from the Waccamaw Workforce Investment Board, Georgetown County Economic Development, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, Williamsburg County, Santee Electric Cooperative and the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District.

"We want to thank all of our presenters and sponsors for making this event possible. I think all the information presented was of great interest to the leaders and business owners in our community, and we look forward to bringing this event back in 2016," said Sarah Smith, executive director for Waccamaw Regional.

For more information about the forum, the Economic Outlook Board or Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments, visit www.wrcog.org, or contact Rhonda Smith, (843) 546-8502 or rsmith@wrcog.org.

Assisted Rides

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transportation.

In the month of January alone, Assisted Rides provided rides totaling 34,557 miles.

"For some of our riders, including those who use Assisted Rides to get to dialysis, this program is vital," Cason said. "Assisted Rides is very much needed, especially in the more rural parts of our region and we're so grateful that our incredible team of volunteer drivers makes it possible for us to get so many people where they need to go."

George Bradshaw, 68, who lives in the Winyah community of Georgetown, is a veteran who utilizes Assisted Rides to get to the VA hospital in Charleston. He's been a rider for three months and says he loves the program, the staff and the drivers.

"Everybody's been real nice to me. I was not expecting that," he said.

Before he discovered Assisted Rides, he would have to catch a veterans transport van from Myrtle Beach, which stops in the City of Georgetown at 6:45 a.m. on most weekday mornings. But the 15-mile trip to get to the van was sometimes an insurmountable hurdle.

"I'd have to leave my house before daylight when I could get a ride," he said. "I had to cancel some of my appointments." When he could make his appointments, he'd be in Charleston the whole day waiting on the van to depart and bring him back. "Since I got started with this organization, I haven't had any more problems getting to my appointments and they get me there and back home safe. The drivers are excellent."

Though Assisted Rides is able to improve the lives of many people like Bradshaw in the tri-county region, Cason unfortunately has to turn away some ride recipients, either because volunteer drivers aren't available to get a rider to their requested destination or because the person requesting



Volunteers participate in training at the Kingstree Library.

the ride doesn't meet the eligibility requirements for the program. Some of the requests that have to be turned down include those from people who can drive, but find themselves temporarily stranded due to mechanical problems with their vehicles or because they can't afford gas for their vehicles.

"They are in need, but we can't serve them. I wish I could give rides to everybody who calls, but the funding isn't there and we have to make sure people meet the requirements for qualification," Cason said.

Additionally, Assisted Rides frequently receives requests for emergency transportation. Those have to be turned down, because the program's volunteer drivers don't have the training to handle medical emergencies. Those callers are generally instructed to dial 911. The program also cannot accommodate wheelchair-bound riders, as volunteer drivers use their personal vehicles, which generally are not equipped to accommodate wheelchairs. Riders also cannot be transported out of state through the program.

Cason and Waccamaw Regional are still working to spread the word about the program and connect more qualifying riders with drivers. The program is always in need of more volunteer drivers. Drivers are reimbursed for mileage and can select which trips they agree to provide. Volunteers with an interest in fundraising are also welcome.

Cason said she has recently introduced a program to Assisted Rides that seeks to pair riders and drivers on

Assisted Rides given in January 2015:

- 30 rides for people residing in rural Horry County (including Loris, Longs, Little River and Conway),
- 40 rides from Kingstree to medical appointments in Florence,
- Transportation for eight people to Caring and Sharing to pick up food boxes,
- Four rides to Coastal Eye Group for appointments,
- Transportation for 34 veterans to medical appointments in Charleston, Myrtle Beach and Columbia
- 44 rides to Georgetown Hospital system,
- Eight rides to the Medical University of Charleston,
- Eight rides to see other medical specialists in Charleston,
- Six rides to St. James Medical Clinic,
- 20 rides to Smith Medical Clinic,
- Transportation for nine people to dialysis appointments (totaling 234 rides), and
- 36 rides to locations including social services offices, religious services, grocery stores and pharmacies.

Total: 34,557 miles

a more permanent basis by allowing drivers to "adopt" a rider when the two seem to get along well. The hope is that it will allow the program to retain drivers and ease apprehension for some elderly riders about getting into a car with a stranger. Cason hopes it may also help to get regular rides for more dialysis patients. The program currently has a waiting list for those in need of rides to dialysis appointments.

For more information about Assisted Rides or Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments, visit www.wrcog.org, or contact Trina Cason, (843) 436-2110 or tca-son@wrcog.org.

WRCOG receives Bunnelle Foundation grant to allow for continuation of Pawleys Island water monitoring program

The Section 208 Regional Water Quality Program partners with numerous entities including local governments, water and sewer utility districts, nonprofit organizations, research institutions and state and federal agencies to help coordinate resources to protect the water quality of surface waterbodies within the Waccamaw Region.

One of the longest standing partnerships is with the United States Geological Survey (USGS), which maintains a network of real-time surface water monitoring stations throughout the country. There are a total of 14 monitoring stations located in the Waccamaw region, including sites on Buck Creek, the Waccamaw River, Crabtree Swamp, the Atlantic Intra-coastal Waterway, the Pee Dee River, Turkey Creek and the Black River.

These stations provide critical information that assists water resource managers in mitigation of drought conditions, projecting flood heights, responding to occurrences of salt water intrusion and many other important purposes. The USGS relies on match funding support from local

management entities to operate the monitoring network. In 2014, the costs of maintaining the stations increased, jeopardizing the continuation of the Pawleys Island gauge on the Waccamaw River.

“Regional partnerships will continue to be vital to ensuring the continuation of the Pawleys Island gauge.”

On behalf of the Section 208 Program partners, the Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments applied for a Bunnelle Foundation grant

to cover the remaining funding gap and ensure continued operation at this station through June 30, 2016.

Regional partnerships will to continue to be vital to ensuring the continuation of the Pawleys Island gauge and the other monitoring stations in our region.

To view data collected at this monitoring site, visit the USGS website, <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/sc/nwis/current/>, and enter monitoring station # 021108125.

Thanks to Bunnelle Foundation for their generous support! For questions about the USGS Water Monitoring program or to receive updates on the future status of the Pawleys Island gauge, contact Daniel Newquist at dnewquist@wrcog.org or (843) 436-6131.



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