

PRESS & GUIDE

Dearborn makes dedication of new senior SMART vans and offering bilingual service

March 30, 2008

DEARBORN - A ceremony took place on Wednesday to dedicate two new SMART vans that will serve Dearborn senior citizens, and to celebrate the launch of Southeast Michigan's first bilingual transportation services program.

The ceremony took place at Dearborn's Ford Community & Performing Arts Center. The two new vans are lift-equipped to serve the needs of wheelchair users and were provided to the city of Dearborn by SMART at a reduced cost.

"Dearborn's proud to offer an excellent transportation program for our senior citizens," said Dearborn Mayor Jack O'Reilly. "With SMART's help, we're now enhancing it. We've seen a big increase in residents' use of the van service. With these new vehicles, and with the new bilingual assistance program, we are in a position to offer this critical service to more seniors than ever before."

The bilingual services program is the first of its kind in SMART's Community Partnership Program. It provides bilingual schedulers and drivers to help Arabic-speaking seniors take part in the city's van service program.

In 2007, the van service program provided more than 9,500 rides to seniors needing transportation for important activities like medical appointments, banking and grocery shopping.

"This unique service was designed specifically to better serve the Arab American population and to meet the growing needs of the seniors in the community," said Hayes W. Jones, SMART general manager.

SMART and the city of Dearborn worked together to identify the need for bilingual assistance as a way to help more seniors make use of the vital service. The two organizations then jointly developed the new bilingual program.

Established in 1997, SMART's Community Partnership Program (CPP) is a cooperative effort between SMART and participating communities, in which funding is made available to develop and operate transportation services, as a way to encourage more transit options for local residents.

Dearborn is one of 75 communities that partner with SMART to develop their unique transportation programs. Dearborn acquired SMART vans for a fraction of their cost.

The CPP program enables communities, using a portion of their SMART Community Credit allocation, to pay 20 percent of the cost of a new vehicle. SMART, using its federal grant dollars, pays for the remaining 80 percent.

In effect, this unique program enables SMART to return additional federal dollars directly to the residents of the partner communities, to fund transportation services designed and operated by them.

Recognized nationally as an innovator in community-based service for its unique partnerships with 75 communities, SMART is posting record ridership with more than 12 million passengers using the service annually.