

New Shuttle Free To The Community

By Dianne Anderson



From now on, all those excuses for missing your doctor's appointments, not eating your fresh vegetables, not getting out to your local senior center, or missing out on the fun are just plain lame.

Waterman Gardens' new neighborhood shuttle officially kicked off August 3rd, and is making the rounds to all the best stops that local folks need.

Running Mondays through Fridays from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., the shuttle picks up and drops off in a continuous loop, visiting Mother's Nutritional Center, Molina Medical Group, St. Bernardine's Medical Center, Perris Hill Senior Service Center, Stater Bros Grocery Store, Target, Fresh and Easy Market, and the Goodwill.

The word is starting to spread, and the best part of all is that it's free, said Ana Gamiz, director of policy and community affairs for the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino.

Molina Healthcare approached the Housing Authority with a 16-passenger shuttle donation as part of their history of service to the community, she said. It's the healthcare group's third neighborhood service; the others are in Long Beach and Fontana.

Molina is picking up all associated costs.

"There's a little bit of everything for everyone, if the kids want to go out shopping, the parents need to go grocery shopping or people just going to the different medical centers, they have access," Ms. Gamiz said.

In the past, the community has expressed a strong need for transportation at Housing Authority meetings, especially to the medical facilities and grocery stores. The route will make pickups and drop-offs at roughly one hour intervals all day long, the last pick up at 5:00 p.m.

As summertime sears through September, access to cool centers for seniors will help save on electric bills and get seniors out of the house.

The shuttle is making Dolores Diaz' life a lot easier by allowing her and other seniors to hook up in groups to go shopping together. She's been taking the shuttle pilot program a couple of weeks now, and she loves it.

"I wasn't able to go anywhere and now I'm able to go all of these places. I usually see about 8 to 12 people [on board]," said Diaz, a Waterman Gardens resident.

She said that people are finally starting to get the message that they don't have to sit inside all day.

"As I walk around, they ask have you been on the shuttle yet? They're really enjoying it," she said.

Passengers can access nearby businesses at the drop-off points, like the Department of Social Services next to the Fresh and Easy Market, or the auto center next to Goodwill.

Molina, 35 years old, is located in 10 states with facilities in five counties in California. They also partner with St. Bernardine's so patients can have easy access to medical care.

Ruthy Argumedo, director of community outreach for Molina, said their health group also has a community information center at the Inland Center Mall, providing extra information on local

resources, such as food banks and shelters. Or, seniors can come and sit in the lounge to learn more about Medicare, and get linked to other community services.

It's a holistic approach that makes folks do a double-take when they learn it's free.

"We've had people call and say, so what's the catch? There is no catch," she said.

Year ago, Molina's founder, an emergency room doctor, kept noticing that Medi-Cal patients coming to the ER were treated like second-class citizens.

"He thought how could this be; this is not right, who are we to discriminate?" Argumedo said.

Nancy Finch, property manager at Waterman Gardens, said the shuttle is open to everyone, young and old, but it will be especially helpful to seniors, who can now get out safely to socialize and take care of business. She said residents had a lot of input into the route.

"They can get healthier food instead of fast food; they can go to their doctors and hospitals. This one little thing has such a large ripple effect, here at Waterman Gardens. We're so excited," she said.

For more information log on to <http://www.molinahealthcare.com/> or call 1-888-665-4621.

written by: precinct reporter group