

## **LOCAL AGENCY “BUILDING INTO THE FUTURE”**

The Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Inc. (CCAAA) recently received notification that they were successful in obtaining a competitive \$20,000 to convert two fleet vans to operate on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). The funds will be provided through a Walmart Foundation - MOWAA Building the Future Impact Grant. The vans will be converted to an EPA-Approved Compressed Natural Gas fuel system by Alternative Fuel Solutions of Pennsylvania located in Mahaffey, Clearfield County. Once installed, the vans will have the capability to operate on CNG or gasoline by simply flipping a switch. Vans with the new CNG tanks will be placed into service immediately. As funds become available or as new grants are awarded, the CCAAA intends to continue converting more vans until the entire fleet is CNG enabled. This will reduce meal delivery costs significantly, ensure the program can be sustained, and strengthen our capacity to serve all who need meals.

According to a national survey conducted by the MOWAA, many Meals on Wheels programs nationwide are struggling due to the increase in the price of gas. “Sixty-seven percent believe their program will have to cut back on meal service if the price of gas exceeds anywhere in the range of \$4.50 to \$5.00. This crisis presents an urgent situation for Meals on Wheels considering that their programs serve approximately 1 million meals per day.” (<http://www.mowaa.org/page.aspx?pid=903>)

The effects of the unstable gasoline prices impact negatively on the local Meals on Wheels and More program, a service of the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Inc. The Agency set out to find alternative solutions to combat the volatile market. The Agency serves a 1042 square mile rural area with harsh terrain, extreme weather conditions, and sub-standard roads. The 11 vans in their sophisticated delivery system log over 17,200 miles monthly.

In 2008, gasoline prices were over \$4/gallon. The CCAAA system adjusted partially for the increase by combining meal routes and converting some consumers to frozen meals in order to reduce delivery frequency. Gas costs stabilized in 2009-10, but still constantly fluctuate in response to international events and weather disruptions on US shores. These variables challenge meal delivery in rural Clearfield County. The CCAAA decided to seek out a stable fuel source which is cost efficient, environmental friendly, and not subject to international influences.

Over the past two years, CCAAA staff researched the possibilities of converting the Meals on Wheels and More fleet to operate on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). Meetings were held with legislators and representatives from funding sources. They visited other locations throughout the region where the CNG conversion and operations were successfully operating on a daily basis.

With the opening of Alternative Fuel Solutions of Pennsylvania (Mahaffey, PA), a locally owned and operated CNG conversion station, the CCAAA was able to witness fuel system conversions first-hand and to obtain quotes. Early this year, the CCAAA learned of a grant opportunity through the Meals on Wheels Association of America (MOWAA) and the Walmart Foundation. The goal of the Walmart Foundation - MOWAA Building the Future Impact Grant is to expand services now and into the future, as the senior population increases and the demand on services grows. By granting competitive cash awards to selected MOWAA member programs, it would be possible to assist senior nutrition programs in implementing operational improvements that would ensure their sustainability and foster long-term growth.

This grant was a perfect match for the CCAAA and its CNG-Conversion project. They applied for funding in March and received notification of their award in early May.

“This grant will help ensure we can continue to meet the growing needs of the populations we serve. No senior will wait for service; no senior will go hungry,” stated Rikki Ross from the CCAAA. She added, “We will ensure sustainability of the current program, financially as well as programmatically, due to natural gas being a readily available American product, not subject to international disruptions or significant fluctuations in price and our Agency will serve as a model of environmental stewardship.”

The CCAAA believes they are at the beginning of a great project that will benefit not only their own organization and the people they serve, but could also be the catalyst to start the growth of a new type of infrastructure and service system for the Clearfield County area.