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YELLOW SPRINGS NEWS

FALL BACK! Set your clocks one hour back Sunday, Nov. 1, at 2 a.m.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Leaf, laugh, love

The verdict is in: This has been one of the most pleasant autumns for Yellow Springs in recent memory. Sunny skies and clement weather have prolonged the season's colors, with many a leaf still clinging to its branches. Still, fall has fallen — leaf piles have been raked all around town, making for great fun for youngsters, like those at Open Air Village, pictured above.

'Karpathos'—

The distance from home

Village Council—

Next steps in manager search

By Reilly Dixon

Village Council is poised to take its next steps in finding a permanent Village manager.

At the group's forthcoming meeting, Monday, Nov. 2, the group is expected to pass a resolution to contract with management consulting and administrative search firm Pracademic Partners, LLC, to conduct a manager search.

According to a proposal issued to Council earlier this month, Pracademic's search process will take 10 to 12 weeks — longer if necessary — and will cost $24,500. That amount includes Pracademic's professional services, recruitment advertising, background investigations, reference checks and additional due diligence.

The proposal recommends that an additional allowance of $2,500 is added to the fee for public engagement sessions involving finalist candidates. Council has repeatedly stated that the group wants to include local voices in the search process.

Based in New York, Pracademic has made more than 60 successful executive or administrative hirings across 14 states, including Oberlin, Ohio, which is politically and structurally similar to Yellow Springs, with a Council-manager form of government.

Pracademic's typical search process follows this timeline:

- Weeks one to two are for gathering local data and information. From discussions with local leaders, the firm will develop a manager position profile, recruitment strategy, timeline and communication plan.
- Weeks two to three are for "pre-recruitment," which entails the development of a recruitment brochure, placement plan and initial candidate outreach list.
- Weeks three to six involve advertising the job, reaching out to potential candidates, reviewing applications and conducting preliminary screens.
- Weeks six to eight are spent coordinating interviews between Village Council and manager candidates.
- The last two to four weeks will be spent finalizing a hire — conducting background investigations, verifying credentials and cementing an employment agreement and compensation.

At the last Village Council meeting, Oct. 19, the group decided by a vote of 3–1 to bring forward next week's resolution to contract with Pracademic; Council member Carmen Brown was the dissenting vote, and Council member Senay Semere was absent.

The decision before the group was to go with either Pracademic or Raftelis, a much

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YSSC Transportation Program—

Neighbors, along for the ride

By Lauren "Chuck" Shows

When local resident Jo Ann Kiser needed to get to medical appointments every weekday for more than a month, she let the Yellow Springs Senior Center know. Kiser doesn't own a car, and after receiving a serious diagnosis, she needed a way to get to appointments. The YS Senior Center's Transportation Program provided rides for most of those days.

"Without the program, I probably wouldn't get to all of them," she said.

Kiser is one of many local seniors — and folks of any age who can't drive for medical reasons — who are aided by the Transportation Program, which has provided free rides to qualifying riders who request them for more than 20 years. Last year, 23 volunteer drivers and staff members gave 817 rides to 101 people in the Senior Center's three cars. Volunteers donated more than 900 hours and traveled more than 15,000 miles; medical trips outside the village accounted for 81% of rides.

According to Transportation Manager Robert Libecap, who spoke with the News last week, ride requests are up 30% this year, and the program has gone from providing about 15–18 rides a week to 18–25. A core group of about 15 volunteers drives weekly, with others helping throughout the month when they can and staff members taking turns behind the wheel to fill out the roster.

The Senior Center is looking for more volunteers to share that work — from folks who can offer dedicated time every week to those who can contribute a few hours per month. All of it, Libecap said, can help.

"It's a matter of building resources so we can service the demand," he said.

The increase in need for both the program's service and volunteers comes after Greene CATS public transit diminished the services it provided following cuts to federal funding. As the News reported earlier this year, Greene CATS eliminated its Flex Routes July 1, including the route connecting Yellow Springs to Xenia and Fairborn. The transit system also increased its fee schedule and tied fares to distance, with adult fares of $5, $10 or $15 per one-way trip based on mileage.

Libecap said that, though the increase in people using the Transportation Program hasn't directly been a matter of taking over trips formerly provided by Greene CATS, he believes the loss of the local Flex Routes has drawn more attention to the Senior Center's program.

"I think it's highlighted our services a good bit more," he said. "People weren't using Greene CATS to go to Xenia for doctor's appointments. ... But I think it's the absence of having transportation that has people going, 'What are we going to do?'"

The Senior Center's door-to-door service differs from the former bus routes, and can't replace them, Libecap added. Drivers

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Transportation

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pick passengers up at home, take them to their appointments and bring them home afterward. The program also provides rides for errands and other appointments.

"And lately, there have been times that people have called, even with enough lead time, and we could not find a driver for them or a time that a car was available," Executive Director Caroline Mullin said.

The Senior Center recently hired Christine Gates as assistant transportation manager with support from a Yellow Springs Community Foundation grant. Though Gates' hiring coincided with the public transit cuts, Mullin said the need for a second position had been apparent for years as Libecap's workload exceeded his allotted hours.

Libecap, who has managed the program for 11 years, said sharing the work has made it easier for callers to reach someone throughout the day. He and Gates also coordinate trips when passengers have appointments near one another; sometimes, someone can move an appointment to a day when transportation is available.

Volunteers generally drive the Senior Center's vehicles, with the program covering gasoline and other vehicle expenses. While passengers are at appointments, drivers might read or, with permission, run an errand nearby; each vehicle has a phone so passengers can reach their driver. A separate medical escort program provides additional training for volunteers who accompany passengers needing more help, such as taking in information during an appointment or getting settled at home after a procedure.

Providing more rides has meant higher fuel expenses, too. Mullin said the Senior Center uses hybrid vehicles and combines trips where possible to save on gas. The Greene County Council on Aging supports the program through the county's 1.4-mill Senior Services Levy, including providing a new vehicle for the program every other year.

Along with arranging rides, Libecap said, he and Gates try to help people feel comfortable asking for assistance.

"It's difficult for people to ask for help, and our job is to lower that barrier," he said.

Gates said she's talked to passengers who once volunteered as drivers themselves, and who have since come to rely on the program.

"Looking back, they didn't realize what it was like to be on the other side," she said. "And just talking about how important it is to get these rides."

"All of this is about promoting agency, independence, and extending the time that we can be self-reliant at home or in care facilities," Libecap added. "We have people who have built this community, and now we're trying to support their needs."

Local resident Artie Isaac, a volunteer driver, said he drove a taxi for Yellow Cab in Columbus as a teenager, so driving for the Senior Center has been right up his proverbial alley. He's been volunteering catch-as-catch-can thus far, but having recently retired from his business practice, now aims to drive once a week. Driving for the Senior Center, he said, is one way he responds to a world that can feel bereft of personal connection.

"And the question I ask myself is, 'Well, what are you doing about it, Artie?' And driving someone to an essential appointment is what I'm doing about it," he said.

Kiser, who's lived in Yellow Springs for more than eight years, said that, over and above getting her where she needs to go, she appreciates the rides as a way to get acquainted with fellow villagers. And as a writer — her third novel, "Opal: A Kentucky Woman," was launched locally this month — she said her conversations with volunteers tend to engage her storyteller's ear.

"Some of the volunteers themselves are so interesting, and sometimes they have such great stories to tell," she said.

Isaac said the feeling is mutual from the driver's seat: "I've met some really interesting people who are wonderful. ... The village has become more of a neighborhood for me."

Sue Parker, who's lived in Yellow Springs for about 55 years, said she was "in a pinch" after being diagnosed with macular degeneration several years ago, and has relied on the Transportation Program off and on since then to get her to various doctor's appointments. Like Kiser, she said the rides have value outside of transport, in that having someone else in the vehicle on the way to a medical procedure often helps alleviate some of the anxiety that some folks experience ahead of time. And the rides have brought Parker back in touch with people she hadn't seen for some time, including longtime volunteer Richard Zopf.

"He is one of the most amazing volunteers, because he will go anywhere, do anything," Parker said.

She recalled a trip Zopf drove her on years ago, to an eye appointment where the wait was long. While she was inside, he went looking for roadside trash to pick up; by the time they headed home, the evidence of his work was rattling around in the trunk of the car.

"Isn't that such a wonderful, creative thing to do?" she said.

For his part, as a driver, Isaac said he feels like he's been as much a beneficiary of the Transportation Program as one of its benefactors: having lived in the village for nine years, taking neighbors for drives has helped him settle deeper into the community.

"Generally, I'm meeting people who live not more than 200 or 300 yards away, and I just had never met them — they tell me their stories, and I learn about Yellow Springs," Isaac said. "Might be, if you feel like you're new to Yellow Springs, this will make you not new."

And that's the heart of what the Transportation Program, and all of the Senior Center's programs and services, really aim to do, Libecap said: "It's all part of why we're here is to build community."

Ride requests require three to four days' notice, with a weekend counting as one day; passengers receive confirmation two to three days before their ride. Rides are generally provided Monday through Friday, from early morning until about 3 p.m., when staff are available to support drivers on the road. There is no charge for rides, though donations are appreciated.

People interested in volunteering can contact Libecap at rlibecap@ysseniors.org, Gates at cgates@ysseniors.org or Maggie Dean at mdean@ysseniors.org, or call the Senior Center at 937-767-5751.

Contact: chuck@ysnews.com