



# Heroes of COMPASSION

*Seniors Living, Loving, and Giving for a Better Community*



*Provide-A-Ride volunteers have driven more than seven million miles in three decades to help our elderly neighbors remain healthy and independent.*

## After Thirty Years, Provide-A-Ride Program Closes

A letter from Executive Director Beth Patterson

### 30 YEARS OF SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

The RSVP Board of Directors and I recognized a need in our community 30 years ago that we confidentially knew we could help to bridge. At that time, older, low-income adults who could no longer drive, and who needed rides to their doctor's appointments, had limited transportation services available to them. In 1994, RSVP of Central Oklahoma launched Provide-A-Ride and recruited volunteer drivers who for three decades provided compassionate, safe, and reliable medical rides to the elderly in our community.

We have taken a lot of pride in being able to meet that need for 30 years with 335 RSVP volunteer drivers, providing 1,330 low-income elderly clients nearly 135,000 rides to their doctors.

### EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

Since the pandemic, due to fear of being exposed to COVID, feeling high anxiety levels, and family

concerns, 67 percent of our volunteer drivers chose to discontinue driving for Provide-A-Ride. Despite many concentrated volunteer driver recruitment efforts, we didn't rebound to pre-COVID numbers. Also, after talking with our Provide-A-Ride clients, we have learned that 75 percent of them feel they can secure rides to their doctor appointments from their family, friends, church, or neighbor.

### STEWARDED DONATIONS WITH WISDOM

With thoughtful consideration, the RSVP Board of Directors decided it is time to wrap up the Provide-A-Ride program, ending April 2023. As our Board President Kathleen O'Toole noted, "... this is a decision to continue being good stewards of our financial donations. With less volunteer drivers, we are serving less seniors. Since the pandemic started Provide-A-Ride has only met 35 percent of our goals."

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*Neighbors Helping Neighbors*

# Linda Suchak

“The Toy Guru”



*Linda Suchak, Volunteer*

## At Infant Crisis Services, RSVP volunteer Linda Suchak, 73, is known as the toy guru.

The Warr Acres resident has been a faithful volunteer for 18 years giving time to several nonprofits, including Mobile Meals, but her real passion for many years has been with Infant Crisis Services, an organization that provides formula, food, diapers, clothing, and even toys for babies and toddlers.



*Linda organizes and cleans donated toys at Infant Crisis Services.*

Linda said she loves checking in the donated toys, used and sometimes new, assuring that they are age-appropriate, in good condition, and safe for children. “I’m just a senior citizen who still plays with toys,” she said. “That is the one particular duty at Infant

Crisis Services that I have loved the most.”

Linda is the youngest of 10 children, born and raised in Oklahoma. She graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in early childhood education. In 2004, she retired from the State of Oklahoma after serving 34 years in the field of childcare licensing.

**“Volunteering brings to my life a sense of purpose,” she said. “I’m able to do something to help—something that helps parents who may not have the finances to provide toys for their children.**

Children need play because that’s how they learn—they develop physical skills, cognitive skills, people skills, social skills. It really helps me to feel like I’m doing something to help a child.”

**Interested in volunteering? Contact Laura McRaniels at 405-605-3110.**

## Partner Agency Highlight Regional Food Bank

Our partner agency, The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma does incredible work in our community to help older adults who are on fixed incomes. Partnering with the Oklahoma City Housing Authority (OCHA), its Senior Pantry Program currently has two on-site pantries with eight more to open in the future.



Having the pantries onsite within clients’ buildings is a plus for seniors with limited mobility and lack of transportation. Special Health Projects Manager Mason Weaver says, “Senior food pantries simply cannot run without dedicated volunteers. We’re always looking for friendly faces to greet our residents and help them pick out groceries, as well as sharp minds to shelve, stock, and keep our shopping space clean and organized. Seniors helping seniors make our housing authority food pantries different than any other food assistance program.”

**To learn more about the volunteer opportunities with Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma’s Senior Pantry Program, contact Laura McRaniels at 405-605-3110.**

# Connecting Volunteers with Community Opportunities



## MAKE-A-WISH

Make-A-Wish volunteers are at the heart of every wish experience, playing an invaluable role in getting closer to granting the wish of every eligible child. Some volunteer opportunities include Wish-Grantor, Wish-Assessor, office volunteer, or special events/projects helper.

## Science Museum Oklahoma

Volunteers are needed to help make every day a great day for guests. Duties available include bus greeters, StoryTime Science assistants, tours, garden maintenance, and collection assistants.



To learn more about volunteering contact Assistant Director Laura McRaniels at 405-605-3110 or email [laura.mcraniels@rsvpokc.org](mailto:laura.mcraniels@rsvpokc.org)

## Neighbors Helping Neighbors

# Gwen Wallace

## Mobile Meals Volunteer



Gwen Wallace said her volunteering began in 2008 after watching television and seeing Hurricane Gustav evacuees from Louisiana get off a bus in Oklahoma City where they would live in a Red Cross shelter.

“I had just retired from the school system and had a year of doing nothing,” the Oklahoma City resident explained. “I saw these people getting off the bus with nothing in their hands. My friend and I jumped in with the Red Cross doing volunteer work.”

Once their volunteer work ended with Red Cross, they asked, “What can we do now?” That started a long relationship with the Mobile Meals program at her church in Spencer, St. Luke’s Baptist, an RSVP partner, as well as with other Mobile Meals programs in the Spencer area.

“This volunteer program helps me deal with serious life disruptions,” Gwen said. “I lost my sister and then eight days later, my granddaughter died suddenly. Being able to help others took that sense of loss and gives me a sense of pride.”

**Gwen, who is 78, said that volunteering also gives her physical and emotional health.**

“When you don’t move those joints, they start getting rusty,” she said. “I get up, volunteer at least three days a week, help with the prepping, and I really love developing relationships with my clients and other Mobile Meals workers. It gives me a sense of contentment in my life and helps me release the stresses, anxieties, and depressions that sometimes come with getting older.”



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## THANK YOU FOR 30 YEARS - WE ARE SO GRATEFUL

We are most grateful to our volunteer drivers who drove over 7 million miles on their personal vehicles to help our elderly neighbors remain healthy and independent. We also thank Areawide Aging Agency, EMBARK, and United Way of Central OK for their 30 years of financial support

and guidance. And we thank so many others including the Oklahoma County Social Services, Oklahoma City Community Foundation, and the many individuals and local foundations for their financial support over the past three decades.

Although we are closing our Provide-A-Ride program, RSVP of Central Oklahoma is still a vibrant part of our community matching the interests, skills, and experiences of people 55+ with community volunteer opportunities. We celebrate our 50th anniversary this year and appreciate the legacy our volunteers and partner agencies have helped to create.

*Beth Patterson*

Beth Patterson  
Executive Director



## *In Fond Remembrance*

In loving memory of our volunteers whose generosity in service touched all our lives.

*Ivan Deatsch*

*Gloria Wilson*

*Mary Ann Chronister*

A proud partner of:



Congratulations to  
**YVONNE ROLFE**  
winner of the hours drawing.  
Enjoy your gift card!

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## *RSVP Celebrates!*



## *Welcome Baby Boy*

**ARTHUR ANTHONY**

Laura and her husband, Alex, welcomed their baby boy, Arthur Anthony, into the world February 27 at 10 a.m. He weighed 9 pounds and four ounces.

*Congratulations to the whole family!*