

# LOCAL Life

November 26, 2009 Page 17

Chestnut Hill Local

## Celebrating 25 years of rides for Hill area residents

We recently attended a 25th "birthday party" (with lots of goodies!) at Springfield Residence, 551 East Evergreen Ave. in Wyndmoor. The honoree was not a person but an organization: the Riders' Club Cooperative. The Riders' Club

fee, plus modest per-ride charges based on time and distance. These are covered by pre-paid vouchers issued by the Cooperative — no cash, no tipping.

- One-way or round-trip rides are provided by fully insured drivers (mostly younger retirees) using their own late-model cars or minivans. Each driver must have a minimum of three years' accident-free and ticket-free driving, and must pass a rigorous background check. Drivers carry picture IDs.

- Rides are available Mondays through Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

They are scheduled with a phone call the day before to Mr. Wray or to Erika Wallace, Operations Manager. (Erika lives on the Hill with her husband, Wes Somerville, and two children.)

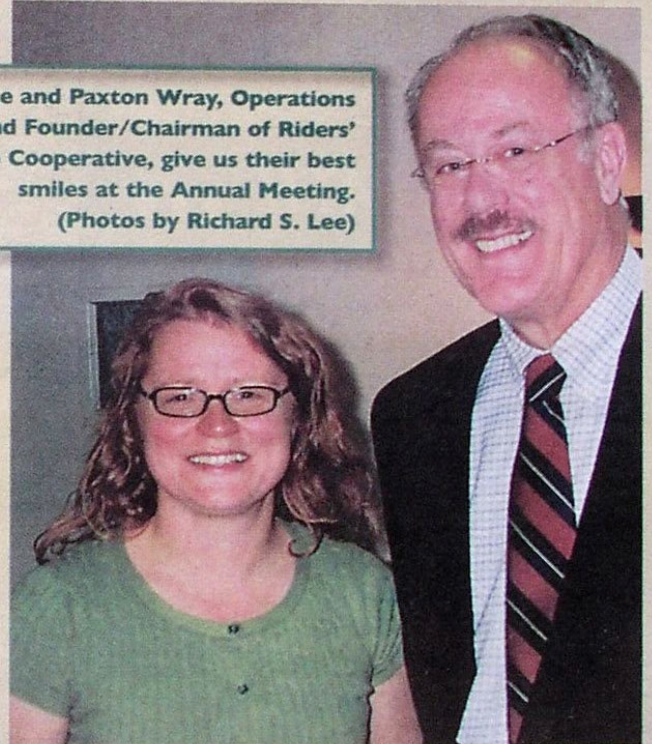
- The Cooperative serves clients in about an eight-mile radius of the Hill, give or take a mile. (Inquire.) Rides must originate within the area served,

### Facts of Life

By Mary Price Lee & Richard S. Lee



**Erika Wallace and Paxton Wray, Operations Manager and Founder/Chairman of Riders' Club Cooperative, give us their best smiles at the Annual Meeting. (Photos by Richard S. Lee)**



serves up from 60 to 80 auto rides a day, six days a week, in the Greater Chestnut Hill area. The Cooperative has over 600 people who use its services, but we had never heard of it, and it may be welcome news to you as well.

The Riders' Club Cooperative was founded in 1984 by Paxton Wray of Erdenheim. Mr. Wray is the Cooperative's founder and president, and the "party" we attended was actually the appointment of its Board of Directors, voted on by members' ballots, as well as commemorating its 25th year. It was also the occa-



**People who have to go to the supermarket but are not able to drive or get a ride with a friend can contact the Riders' Club for help.**

sion for recognizing the dedication of some of its many drivers — again, selected by the votes of the Cooperative's members.

The Cooperative is the same nonprofit concept as Mt. Airy's Weaver's Way Co-op, soon to grace the Hill, only it offers transportation, not food. Here's how it works:

- There are two classes of membership, household/individual, and corporate/supporting. Each membership class pays a yearly

but can be to just about anywhere, and for virtually any reason. Riders use the Cooperative for everything from doctor's appointments and shopping to airport drop-offs and center city trips to the orchestra or matinee theater.

How did the Riders' Club Cooperative come into existence? Here is some history: Its founder, Paxton Wray, 66, is a former Presbyterian minister and a charming gentleman. He

also has a degree in city planning from the University of Pennsylvania. His wife, Bess, operates Human Touch Homecare, a new company which has been profiled in the Local. The Wrays have three children and five grandkids; they have lived in the area for 36 years.

In 1984, when Wray saw that his daughter's eye problems would prevent her from receiving a driver's license, he conceived the Cooperative as a way to provide transportation for her when the family could not. His ministerial compassion told him there must be others in the Hill area with similar needs. His education in urban planning told him that, while the

Chestnut Hill area was generally convenient for its residents with much within an easy walk, there were gaps that the usual buses and trains could not fill — even with bus rides free and train tickets \$1 for seniors. He also reasoned that, where total reliability and prompt adherence to a schedule were demanded, as in doctors' visits, public taxis would not fill the bill. Thus, the Riders' Club Cooperative was born. It helps meet the two top needs reported in every survey of urban living: access to community resources and viable transportation.

There are three groups for whom Riders' Club Cooperative is most useful: people who no longer drive (or

# 25 years of rides

(Continued from page 17)

who never did); children in need of safe transport; and those who are impaired or with special needs.

Seniors who choose to turn in their car keys can exchange the cost of vehicle, fuel, insurance and repairs for the simplicity of a phone call to the Co-op and a prepaid transportation voucher. (Given the reduced amount of driving some of us older folk may do, the net result of even a much-used Riders' Club membership can be a huge saving over car ownership.)

The lovely lady, Lin, we sat next to at the Springfield Residence put it this way: "All the [Riders' Club] drivers are friendly, courteous and on time. I'm very much satisfied." Since she lives at Springfield Residence, Lin is automatically a Riders' Club member, since the Residence maintains a Corporate Membership for all who live there. (Other senior communities, take note — what a good selling point in these competitive times!)

Paxton Wray explained this corporate membership benefit in an e-mail to us: "Why do we need Corporate and/or Supporting Members? First of all, schools, churches, medical practices, nonprofits and other institutions are crucial actors in the larger community. They have the power to endorse and publicize solutions that work in the community. Second, they are aware of the particular problems of access to resources that affect their students, parishioners, patients, clients, etc. By joining with Riders' Club, they can become part of a sustainable solution to a growing need in our community." That need, of course, is for flexible transportation tailored to the individual.

The Cooperative's transportation for children includes one-time and regularly scheduled pickup for school, camp and after-school activities. Safety is assured: a Co-op driver escorting children will not leave them until or unless an adult is present to receive each child safely. (Too many recent cases of children abducted coming home from school attest to the need for the peace-of-mind a Co-op driver can provide.)

The Riders' Club Cooperative really shines when it comes to helping those with disabilities needing extra service. Rides can be planned on a regular schedule, which is strictly adhered-to; reliability and timeliness are prime considerations in such circumstances.

Four of the Riders' Club drivers were recognized with Certificates of Achievement during the "party." They were Eugene Harantschuk of

Wyndmoor, Howard Silverman of Manayunk, Edward T. Longstreth of Glenside, and Charles Humphreys, also of Wyndmoor. The sense of community these and the Cooperative's other 20-plus drivers share with the members they serve is amply evident in the comments that Club members have sent to Paxton Wray. Here are two examples among many:

"It's difficult to thank you adequately for the peace-of-mind you've provided us with this year. You've been an integral (and most certainly pivotal) part of L—'s kindergarten experience, and need only hear her discuss you to know so. I've told more than one prospective kindergarten parent of your utterly dependable and caring service. Above all, this dual working-parent family is warmly grateful for your share in L—'s care."

"I'm so pleased with your service. I have to tell you that if it weren't for your service, I would not be able to stay in the area because I have no family here, and your service has provided just the support I needed when I was ill. Please never think you're not doing something important, because you are."

We could not have said it any better.

To receive more information on Riders' Club Cooperative, call 215-836-1376 during business hours or go online to [www.ridersclubcoop.org](http://www.ridersclubcoop.org)