

Region's Residents Demonstrate Spirit of Giving Year Round

Car donors reap tax benefits, hassle-free title transfers as bonus for helping families through what usually turns out to be a short-term transportation crunch.

Morgantown, WV -- Vickie Kerwin drives from Morgantown to Fairmont every weekday to her job teaching nursing at Fairmont State University. She knows a reliable vehicle is essential to her career success. When she decided it was time for a new car, she did what several Morgantown area residents have done: she donated her old vehicle to the Good News Mountaineer Garage.

"It was a 2001 Subaru Outback," Kerwin says. "I bought it new, and I drove it for ten years. It goes like crazy, in all kinds of weather conditions. I was very particular about it, keeping it serviced on schedule, and I kept it in a garage, so it was in top shape even though it had about 185,000 miles on it. But even though it was a great car, I knew it would be of very little value to a dealership, so my husband and I decided to donate it.

"I got a card from the lady who received it. You know, as you go through this life sometimes you might hope that something you do will have a positive impact on someone besides yourself and your immediate family. I don't know of anything else I've ever done that has had such a tangibly positive outcome."

In October, the Good News Mountaineer Garage celebrated the tenth anniversary of delivering its first car to a family in need of transportation. "In these past ten years, we've placed more than 1,600 vehicles in families that have found themselves in financial difficulty, often due to lack of transportation," says Barbara Bayes, executive director of the statewide nonprofit organization.

Kerwin's Subaru was one of more than 225 vehicles GNMG placed in deserving families in 2011 through the WV Division of Health and Human Services. So was Cynthia Goodwin's 1992 Chrysler LeBaron.

"I had had it for about eight years," Goodwin says. "It was in pretty good shape. I had just put new brakes and rotors on it, but the sticker had come due, and it needed a little body work, and there was something going on with the distributor cap. The guy from GNMG who came to pick it up said there would be no problem getting that fixed.

"My mom and dad passed away last year, so I got their car," says Goodwin, who lives in Blacksville and drives about 30 minutes to her job as the uniforms manager for WVU's Air Force ROTC program. "I decided I wanted to pay it forward. My eldest daughter and I agreed to donate my car. We prayed that a single mother with a young family would get it, and that's what happened. I got a postcard with a picture of a single mom with two kids and the car. It was an answer to our prayers."

Trevor Glenn, a young Morgantown electrician with a new business, described his two-door coupe, "a fast little car with a nice paint job" as something a high school kid would salivate over. Glenn had enjoyed driving it for five or six years but he needed a truck, "something I could haul stuff in," he says. "I thought, rather than having to mess with selling the car, transferring the title and all that, I'd just donate it. I probably could have gotten a little bit out of it, but the benefit of giving it to the Good News Mountaineer Garage, plus the tax break I'm getting for it, was a win all around."

Glenn's sporty little car was sold, and he received the sale price of the car as a federal tax deduction, and will also reap a state tax credit through the WV Development Office's Neighborhood Investment Program. GNMG used the money to repair other vehicles.

Manual Johnson is a production superintendent for a gas drilling company who lived in the Morgantown region until he recently moved to St. Clairsville, Ohio, near Wheeling. He got the idea of donating his vehicle to GNMG from a friend who had donated his old Mustang a year before.

“It was a 2001 Nissan Centra, the first car I ever bought,” Johnson says. “I bought it used. It was a good car, but it wasn’t getting driven. It needed a little work, and I decided I’d rather give it away. “

Once the Good News Mountaineer Garage takes possession of a vehicle, the former owner has no more liability for it. GNMG will arrange to pick up a vehicle, or it can be delivered to any of three garage sites around the state, in Morgantown, Martinsburg, and Charleston. GNMG does all the paperwork to transfer the title, provides required tax documentation, and makes any necessary repairs if the vehicle is to be placed with a family.

“If a vehicle isn’t roadworthy, we can often use it for parts, or sell it for salvage,” Bayes explains, adding that approximately 70 percent of West Virginia’s donated vehicles are placed in families, one of the highest percentages in the nation for car donation programs.

Case managers at WVDHHR say the Good News Mountaineer Garage program is a practical and effective way to help people get off public assistance. “Follow up studies show that after one year, more than 90 percent of the families who received vehicles are no longer on public assistance,” Bayes says. “It’s a hand up, not a hand out.”

Visit www.goodnewsmountaineergarage.com for facts about the program and examples of how donations over the past 10 years have transformed many West Virginians’ lives.