

## Living your Best LIFE

# Driven to assist

Volunteers provide rides for fellow senior citizens through ITN

by Mark Jahne and Lynn Woike  
LIFE staff

**I** have been using ITN drivers for almost 2 1/2 years," said Cynthia Yee, a retired United Church of Christ minister and chaplain, and a member of First Church of Christ Congregational in Farmington with declining eyesight.

"As a volunteer, I offer pastoral care and spiritual care by visiting people related to my congregation wherever they call home. The wonderful drivers for ITN enable me to make three or four visits in one day in varying locations. They are my wheels. In addition to that, they allow me to maintain the principals of confidentiality regarding my visits," she said.

On her day of visits each week, sometimes several drivers participate in getting her where she needs to go when she needs to be there.

"The transportation for each visit moves along efficiently and smoothly. I don't have to worry about missing an appointment or being too late or not being able to get home," Yee said.

"I think of ITN as a crucial part of my support team and also as good friends. Their willingness, their faithful-



Donald Jensen is a volunteer driver for ITN Central Connecticut.



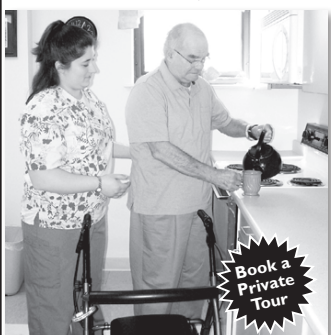
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ness, enables me to continue my ministry of visitation and each day I thank God for the people who volunteer at ITN. They are special."

ITN Central Connecticut, an affiliate of ITNAmerica formed in 2009. The independent transportation network is one of 12 states served by the Maine-based organization whose stated mission is to provide lifelong mobility for senior citizens 60 and older as well as adults of any age who are blind or whose vision impairment does not enable them to drive.

The service is based in room 216 of West Hartford Town Hall and covers the Hartford region and beyond.

Senior citizens and individuals with limited or no vision can join the local chapter for a \$40 annual membership fee. They also pay \$1.50 fee per mile plus a \$3 pickup charge, which is approximately half as much as it would cost to rent a taxi, said Donald Jensen, an Old Wethersfield resident who is one of the busiest drivers with ITN Central Connecticut.

The benefits are that rides can be scheduled for any day, any location and any reason within a reasonable distance.

"The money we get from our riders covers half of our costs," he said.

Those costs include the affiliate fee to the national organization, insurance, telephone service, mailings and the salary of a part-time executive director.

Volunteer drivers using their own vehicles take people wherever they want to go and either stay with them or come back to pick them up for the return trip. They will assist with shopping if asked, help carry the groceries and perform other tasks. For safety reasons, they do not lift individuals.

"We try to be as helpful as we can," Jensen said.

If someone can transfer from a wheelchair into the car and back without assistance, they can get a ride. Close friendships often form and Jensen finds that extremely rewarding.

"My pay is their appreciation. It's fun. I really enjoy it," he said. "It's a friendly organization. We're providing a very useful and needed service I like to drive and we like to help people."

Jensen said ITN volunteer drivers are responsible for their own auto insurance and the nonprofit provides additional insurance support. Volunteers will take members anywhere within the 15 cities and towns they serve as well as to adjacent towns and Bradley International Airport.

A dispatcher in the ITN office at West Hartford Town Hall coordinates all of the ride requests for the following week. Riders must book a driver in advance. Drivers don't question where the person wants to go or why.

The local affiliate has approximately 20 people registered as drivers but only 12-15 are active, according to Jensen. More are needed. Call 860-521-3600 or visit [itncentralct.org](http://itncentralct.org) to learn more or to become a member. **VL**

**"I think of ITN as a crucial part of my support team and also as good friends."**

**- Cynthia Yee**



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