

Free Rides to Eye Appointments Again in March

We are pleased to let you know that rides to eye appointments and the return ride will be free again in March thanks to the grant we have from Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. The grant is for a specific amount of money on an annual basis. Since the number of eye appointment rides we provide varies from month to month, we periodically need to adjust what rides are covered to stay within the limits of the grant. The good news is that, for at least another month, there are enough funds available so we can provide free rides both to and from eye appointments at least through March!

Let's Go Places! – Beginning Delayed Until May

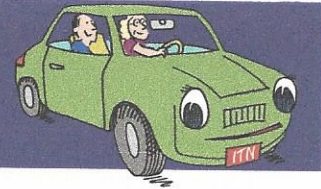
The start of Let's Go Places!, a new service from iTNSunCoast, has been delayed until May. You will be able to get rides for as little as \$10 - \$15 round trip to selected shopping, educational, arts/cultural and dining establishments on a set schedule. As an added benefit, we are negotiating discounts for **Let's Go Places!** riders at local businesses. The cause of the delay is the need to make changes to our computer software to accommodate the new service. Stay tuned. We think you will like what you see when Let's Go Places! gets off the ground. It will be a great opportunity to get out and enjoy what our wonderful area has to offer. If there is a particular place you would like to go, please let us know!

Car Karaoke

Have you seen James Corden on late night TV do car karaoke with celebrity guests? Well, our own Linda Davis (volunteer driver, Secretary of the Board of Directors, and iTNSunCoast cheerleader par excellence) has discovered some hidden talent right here in the SunCoast area. Linda has cleverly turned her car into a recording studio and has found no shortage of local nighingales. "America's Got Talent" beware! "iTNSunCoast Has Talent" is nipping at your heels! Go see Linda and Mrs. Kennedy sing "Get Me to the Church on Time" on a recent Sunday morning on their way to guess where. The link to the video is:

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/SupportITNSarasota/videos/>

Please share the link with you friends and like us on Facebook! We are going viral, baby!!



The Passing of Friends

At iTNSunCoast, it is easy to get attached to our riders. While we only contribute to people's lives in our modest way, the iTNSunCoast drivers and staff are touched by the friendships we develop and the wonderful stories and experiences our riders share with us. That said, periodically one of our riders pass and we are reminded what a gift both life and relationships are. To our riders, we truly thank you for your friendship and wish you all the very best. To the families of those riders who pass, our heartfelt condolences and thank you for sharing your loved one with us.

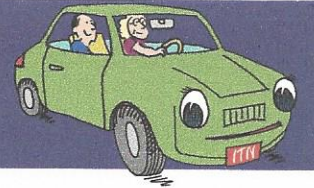
High Season Traffic is Challenging!

Have you noticed that traffic in the SunCoast area in January, February and March can be quite challenging, if not annoying? Well, it certainly causes heartburn for us. We are committed to picking you up on time every time and traffic is hard to predict. So, this time of year, between lots of cars on the road and the sometimes unpredictably length of medical appointments, we are mostly and not always on time. We thank you for your understanding and patience when circumstances beyond our control cause our drivers to be late. Rest assured, we will never leave you without a ride home regardless of the circumstances.

Confirmation Calls

As you know, we routinely make confirmation calls the afternoon before the day a ride is scheduled to take place. This is a good opportunity to confirm the details of rides and to let our riders know who their driver will be. We also know that, for some of you, getting a confirmation call is important in assuring you that the ride you need will take place as scheduled. If you do not receive a confirmation call, it is because we did not have the time to do so. If you are concerned, call us first thing in the morning to confirm the ride. We will never not deliver a requested ride without letting you know in advance.

We do have an important request! If you want to add to your scheduled ride one or more short stops along the way (for example, to pick up a prescription, go to the bank drive thru, or pick up a few groceries), that is not a problem. However, please do not make this type of request during a confirmation call. Give us a call in advance so that we can build your ride in its entirety into the schedule that is set earlier each day. An added stop, as innocent as it may seem, can sometimes cause us as much as a few hours of additional work. Jennifer, our dispatcher, works hard to make sure you get to go where you want to go and she needs your cooperation so she can finish her work on time and spend time with her family.



We Need Your Help

We are growing rapidly. The number of ride requests we received in 2016 was twice the number we received in 2015. We will provide 12,000 to 15,000 rides in 2017. This is a good thing since this is why we exist. At the same time, while this may give the impression that we are doing well, meeting this increased demand for rides comes with real challenges for us financially and in finding volunteer drivers.

In an effort to make our rides affordable by as many people as possible, our charges per ride do not cover our costs. We cover 65% of our costs thru our membership fees and ride fares. The remaining 35% we cover through grants, fundraising and sponsorships. This means that the more rides we provide, the more we need to raise. This is very challenging at a time when there are many worthy causes competing for the same dollars. The reality is that we cannot continue to provide rides if we do not get the needed financial support.

Two years ago volunteer drivers provided 60% of our rides. Last month only 20% of our rides were delivered by volunteers. This shift reflects the rapid increase in the number of ride requests we received, competition with other organizations for volunteers and decreased volunteerism in the USA in general. Attracting volunteers to iTNSunCoast is particularly challenging due to some people's concerns regarding auto insurance coverage in the event of an accident. The drop in the percentage of volunteer rides has very significant financial implications and our monthly payment to paid drivers has increased sharply.

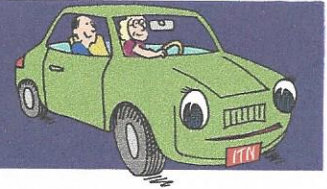
Rest assured that we are not standing still in response to these challenges. We are increasing our efforts to find more volunteer drivers, grants and corporate sponsorships. We are planning more fundraising events. We are also looking at developing new services within our mission that will operate with a surplus to help cover the shortfall in our core membership program.

Here are ways you can help.

- Share with us your ideas regarding attracting volunteer drivers and funding.
- Help us recruit more volunteer drivers by asking neighbors and friends if they or anyone they know might be interested in driving for iTNSunCoast.
- If you know someone who is a member of a local organization like Lions, Kiwanis, University Women's Clubs, etc., give us their contact information so we can book speaking engagements. Knowing someone within an organization is much more effective than cold calling.
- Make a donation or car donation now.
- Attend one of our upcoming fundraising events

Help us help you!

Thank you. We look forward to serving the community for many years to come!



Friendly Reminders

- iTNSunCoast office hours are 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, Monday thru Friday. If you call us after 2 pm, we will get back to you the following day.
- You may request a ride for any reason, on any day of the week including weekends, at any time of the day or night to anywhere within Sarasota and Manatee Counties. **Please make your ride request by 1 pm the day before you want a ride.**
- For rides you need on Sundays and Mondays, please call in your ride requests by 1 pm the previous Friday. On Friday afternoons, we set the schedules for Saturday, Sunday and Monday rides.
- If the details of a particular ride change after you have called us and made the ride request, please let us know asap and do not wait until you receive the confirmation call. Our ride schedules are pretty set by the time of the confirmation calls so making changes at that time can cause problems for us.
- When you call to make a ride request, please be prepared to give us your pickup and destination addresses and the times when you want to get picked up for both portions of your travels.
- You now have the option of submitting ride requests through email instead of giving us a call. Requests should be sent to Jennifer at info@itnsuncoast.org.
- You are welcome to have friends join you for rides to wherever you want to go. Your friends do not have to be iTNSunCoast members and there will be an additional charge of \$2.50 per person per ride. If you have a caregiver who accompanies you on rides, the caregiver rides for free.
- You may request rides for friends to visit you at your home. In this case, we will charge you, our member, the regular fare for the ride requested and it will be up to you to collect the charge or not from your friend.

Thank you for being a member/supporter of iTNSunCoast!!

Arthur Lerman, Executive Director

Susan Shaw, Executive Assistant

Jennifer Edwards, Dispatcher