

## The Good News Mountaineer Garage

By Laurie Thompsen

*\*Names have been changed to protect identities*

Ann\* spent years at home, trapped in a violent relationship. With three young children, no means of transportation and no income, she depended upon her abusive spouse to provide the financial resources necessary to house, feed and clothe her family. After repeated attempts to leave, Ann and her children were finally able to safely move in with her mother. She also obtained a 35-hour-a-week job.



"Giving Old Cars  
New Lives"

Ann's mother was able to help out with the children and to drive her to work, but due to her mother's disabilities and the breakdown of her car, Ann was soon left with no childcare or transportation. Ann did not live on a bus line, so public transit was not an option. In order to make ends meet, she applied for TANF benefits and was referred to the Good News Mountaineer Garage (GNMG) by her caseworker. Through the GNMG, Ann received a used 1991 car in good condition, and was able to keep her job. The car was donated by a woman from Putnam County.

Even though she moved away from her husband, he continued to harass and abuse her. One evening, while dropping her children off at a Child Visitation Center at the local police station, Ann's ex-husband punctured the gas tank of her car. She had filled the tank on the way to the Visitation Center, using a \$20.00 voucher donated by One Stop, and when she returned to her vehicle there was gasoline everywhere.

Ann immediately called the GNMG and they assisted her with towing the car to a mechanic. They also helped her to purchase another gas tank. In addition, the GNMG staff gave a written statement for her to use in court to try and make her

ex-husband pay restitution.

Ann is one of more than 80 women who received a car from the GNMG since October 2001. While not all of the clients experienced domestic violence, those who did cite lack of stable economic support and reliable transportation as two key factors in being unable to leave an abusive relationship. The GNMG offers a realistic means of helping someone to move out from a harmful home situation.

The GNMG officially started in 2001, though initial work on the project began in 1999. A group of West Virginians who wanted to help other families leave welfare rolls organized to initiate work in the development of this non-profit agency.

The idea behind GNMG is simple. It is based on a similar project in Burlington, Vermont. The GNMG accepts donated used cars, fixes them up, and sells them for one dollar to families who are referred by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR). Both women and men, single parent and partnered families have received vehicles through this program.

"We receive donated cars from Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland, but most of our cars come from right here in West Virginia," says Barbara Bayes, GNMG Executive Director. "Many of our donors are women - they often know what it's like and want to help out."

Benefits to donating a car to the program include the possibility of obtaining a federal income tax deduction. The amount of the deduction is based upon the NADA book value and depends upon the car's condition and how many miles it has been driven. If the car is worth more than \$5000, an independent appraisal is required.

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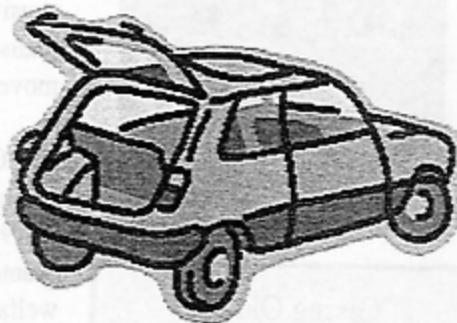
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The GNMG gets a limited number of tax credits each year from the Neighborhood Investment Program (NIPS). If available, an individual who donates a car may also obtain a WV State Tax Credit. Only cars that can be repaired and given to recipients or sold to raise money for the program can be given tax credits. The tax credit can't exceed 50% of an individual's state tax liability in any one year, but it can be spread over a five-year period.

There is no liability to the person donating the vehicle once it is received by GNMG. The car owner signs the title over when the GNMG picks up the vehicle. From that moment on, the car is a GNMG responsibility. GNMG is a licensed used car dealer and will put dealer's plates on the car to transport it. No family is given a car until the repairs are done and the family provides the program with proof of insurance.

Jill Miles, Deputy Attorney General (Consumer Protection and Anti-Trust Division), and GNMG car donor, said that giving a car is a sound financial investment. "By the time you combine the state tax credit and the federal charitable tax deduction, it's not like you are giving the car away at all. We ended up getting as much out of the car as we would have if we'd traded it in," said Miles. However, Miles, like many other donors, says the greatest benefit comes from the satisfaction of knowing that your car is out on the road making a difference for a West Virginia family.

At this time, referrals for cars through DHHR are accepted only from Lincoln and Kanawha Counties, but GNMG is hoping to change that, says Arla



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*--Barbara Bayes*

Ralston, Outreach Coordinator. "We would like to have more GNMG sites in other parts of the state and hope in late winter or early spring to hold a planning meeting for those who are interested in opening programs in their region." If you are interested in receiving information about this meeting, when available, you may contact the GNMG office.

There are many low-income families who are not eligible for TANF but are in need of cars for work or training. If a donated car is safe and reliable, but does not meet the specific criteria for a car to be given to a TANF client, the GNMG is able to offer these vehicles to people both inside and outside of the Kanawha-Lincoln jurisdiction.

One such case is Margaret\*. Margaret is in her mid-fifties, with grown children. After years of abuse by her husband, she left her home and found a job. Margaret knew that she was unable to apply for TANF benefits as her children are adults. She has osteoarthritis and other medical problems, but still was denied SSI benefits.

Margaret works a late day shift and used to take the bus. However, this required a half-hour walk to the bus stop, which was extremely difficult due to her osteoarthritis. By the end of her work shift the buses had stopped running and she had to take a cab home. This took much of her salary and made it too costly to keep her job.

Someone from a local domestic violence program directed her to the GNMG. They were able to sell her a car for about \$150.00. This covered the cost of registration, title, towing, inspection and a brake job. Margaret picked up the car herself and was delighted because without this vehicle she would have been



## Domestic Violence Awareness Month 2002

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month; as such, many activities will be taking place across the state. The following is a small sampling of the planned activities. For more information, or to see how you can get involved, please contact the domestic violence program in your area.

### **Charleston area:**

A play about teen dating violence will be presented October 17 at 6:30 p.m at the Women's Club of Charleston's Clubhouse. A candlelight vigil in honor of domestic violence victims will be held at the Boone County courthouse. Call 340-3549 for information on either event. .

### **Huntington area:**

There will be an "Awareness Walk" and a candlelight vigil. Call 529-2382 for more information. Representatives from Branches will also be at the Lincoln County Oktoberfest.

### **Welch area:**

On October 11th, there will be a memorial service in Welch for people who have died as a result of domestic violence. A service will also be held in Pineville October 18th. The 4th Annual "Celebration Service" will be held October 10th in Bluefield. For more information call 436-8117.

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unable to keep her job. The car is a 1980 Phoenix which Margaret describes in this way: "What a blessing! Having a Phoenix means that I can fly out of the fire and become free."

Executive Director Barbara Bayes is mindful of the car recipients who experience domestic violence in their relationships. She understands that one of the ways to safety and independence is by dealing with the barriers of poverty and transportation. Bayes plans to work with local domestic violence programs around the state on finding grants in order to supply cars to women who utilize the services offered at the domestic violence programs. "It's not enough to simply get someone out of an unsafe relationship; but we must also provide the means for a safe environment and the ability to maintain that independence each and every day. Having reliable transportation is a good start."



For further information on the Good News Mountaineer Garage, you can contact them at (304) 344-8445, 1-866-GIVE-CAR (toll free), or [www.goodnewsmountaineergarage.com](http://www.goodnewsmountaineergarage.com).