

West Valley VIEW

BUSINESS PROVIDES TRANSPORTATION, ASSISTANCE TO SENIOR CITIZENS WHO NO LONGER DRIVE



need more than a taxi cab ride has expanded its service to the West Valley. The service is for people who no longer drive or do not want to drive and need more personal assistance than a taxi cab can offer.

Envoy America, based in Scottsdale, is the idea of two good friends who worked at Intel together for many years. Co-owners K.C. Kanaan and Andy Beran struggled to find a way to provide transportation for their parents who were in their late 70s and early 80s and lived in another state, Kanaan said.

They tried taxi cabs, but they didn't provide the assistance their parents needed getting from the house to the car, in and out of the car, up and down stairs and waiting at the doctor's office or grocery store, for example, he said.

Volunteer drivers provide the assistance a senior needs, but the "number of volunteers is limited and the demand for their help is always high," Kanaan said.

"Transportation systems are not designed for somebody older," he said.

Finally, the two had an "aha moment" when they got

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the idea to start Envoy America to help seniors with similar needs, he said.

A young business, Envoy America started in the metro area in May 2015. It has grown to serve the entire Valley and has plans to expand out of state.

"We provide a service to seniors who can't or don't want to drive, to help them live a normal life by replicating what a son or daughter, a neighbor or friend would do for somebody who can't drive any longer," Kanaan said.

He said the service is affordable. For example, one of his clients hired Envoy to take her to a hair salon

in Phoenix from her house in Mesa. The taxi cab ride alone would have cost \$200 — a 39-mile trip each way plus a pickup fee. Envoy America's charge was about \$90 and that included the time the driver waited while the passenger had her hair done, he said. Clients who ride on a regular basis get a volume discount of 5 to 15 percent, he said. The hourly charge is \$39. The company's

drivers are independent contractors in their 50s and 60s, he said. Envoy America interviews and selects them after background screening and then trains them how to serve the clients. The service is for



Andy Beran and Karim Kanaan co-founded Envoy America to offer transportation options for seniors.

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seniors 65 years of age and older. Clients must call 24 hours in advance to arrange a ride. The charge is based on the time the driver spends with the client, not on mileage, he said.

Helen Petersen, a resident of Mesa, doesn't drive anymore, she said. She used Envoy America to drive her from Mesa to visit friends in Sun City and another time to the beauty parlor, she said. She said the driver offered to hold her arm to assist her to the car. "The driver was such a gentleman," Petersen said. "I can't say enough [about the service]. It is such a help for someone who did drive [but] now has to rely on other methods."

Peoria resident U.T. Smith still drives but not at night, she said. She had to attend a meeting that ended late at night and so called Envoy America for a ride.

"I had the most delightful ride," Smith said.

She had the driver drop her off at the meeting and later go back to take her home. The charge was "very reasonable," she said. "Everybody has their preferences — I like [the service]. I would recommend it to anybody," she said.

Some seniors use the service to take them to entertainment events. Kanaan said he has some clients, three or four friends, who reserved a ride to go to dinner and then to the Herberger Theater Center in Phoenix to watch a play. The cars hold four passengers.

For people who cannot afford the service, a fund has been established to defray most of the cost of the ride. Alan Jablin and his wife, Randi, of Scottsdale created the Friedel Family Senior Transportation Fund. Alan said any Jewish person 65 years of age and older can mention the transportation fund and pay \$5 or \$10 or whatever he or she is comfortable with, rather than the actual cost of the ride. The fund pays the remainder of the charge.

"We would like people to live as normal a life as possible" and be able to go to the doctor, the theater, a religious service or wherever they need to go," he said. "The nice thing is it is not like a taxi service — if you need to go to the grocery store, they will carry the groceries, which I think is a very nice thing."

Kanaan said the service is "not for everybody. It is for someone who pays for transportation but needs a little assistance and is not on a very low or limited income," he said. "We are currently negotiating with investors to take this out of state," he said. "It's unique, different and solves a major problem — they want to help us grow nationally," he said. "There are other companies doing something similar but they are not as comprehensive" and do not have a "national footprint."

