

Handibus society to renew fleet

Donors' contributions top up fundraising goals

Enrique Massot

Substantial help from corporate donors and lottery funds will allow a non-profit group to replace aging buses to continue providing special needs transportation in the M.D. of Rocky View and area urban centres.

With a \$15,000 donation presented Wednesday by Nexen's Balzac gas plant, the Rocky View Regional Handibus Society topped up a \$60,000 fundraising goal started 18 months ago.

"We like to do our part with the community," said Brian McAusland, plant manager, who added the handibus society is one of the favourite charities for the company.

The Rocky View Regional Handibus provides transportation to seniors, the disabled and those in need of health care services, for a

nominal fee.

"What I like about the handibus is that it serves people of all ages, all walks of life in Rocky View," said McAusland.

"It is a great service to have in Rocky View."

Nexen's donation completes equal contributions from the Nickle Family Foundation, the Rotary Club of Calgary Olympic and the Associated Commercial Travellers Club of Calgary.

The four donations plus \$10,000 of Handibus's casino fund-raising will be matched by an Alberta Lottery Grant to make up \$140,000 required for two new vehicles.

"It is amazing what can be done when community groups and corporations get together," said Rocky View reeve Al Schule, who attended the presentation of the cheque in Balzac.

Transportation manager Paul Siller said one of the buses to be replaced has been driven over 550,000 km., while the average mileage on the fleet is 350,000 km.

Siller said high-mileage vehicles demand high maintenance, taking a toll on the society's finances and reducing the vehicles' reliability.

Eighteen months ago, the society started a three-year effort to replace six vehicles at a pace of two per year.

Originally founded as the "C.R.A.B. Society" with a single bus, Rocky View Regional Handibus has been providing special needs transportation since 1980, and now provides 13,000 trips annually through five municipalities located in northeast Rocky View. Approximately 50 seniors, adults and children use the service.

Over 40 organizations,



Glenna Ferguson of Nexen, Brian McAusland, manager of the Nexen Balzac plant, presented a \$15,000 cheque to Paul Siller, manager of transportation for Rocky View Regional Handibus. Present at the event was M.D. of Rocky View reeve Al Schule (right) and JoAnne Miller, director of the handibus society board.

service clubs and corporations have been increasingly supporting the handibus, as provincial support began to dry up in the early nineties. "We don't have much government funding," said Siller. "We provide a lot of ser-

vice that wouldn't be otherwise available given existing rural municipal realities." *Cont'd on page 2*

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In 1993, the provincial government replaced funding to municipalities earmarked for transportation with a municipal grant with no strings attached. As a result, municipal funding for groups such as the Rocky View handibus became uneven, and dried up in some cases.

While municipalities such as the M.D. of Rocky View and Crossfield have been improving transportation funding, other municipalities cut support altogether.

McAusland said the society is doing a great job maximizing donation money.

"Paul takes some money we give from Nexen, he divides it through grants, and he ramps up the money," he said.

Siller said the society is just trying to respond to a growing demand in the community. To that end, it has set the goal of replacing two buses every year.

"Now we have to start work on next year's goal of two more buses," he said.

"The wheels are already in motion."

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