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Community Service Patrol hits the road in new van

by Joshua Armstrong / jarmstrong@newsminer.com

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FAIRBANKS — The Community Service Patrol had to go for the custom package when it needed a new van.

Stainless-steel window grating, a protective acrylic panel behind the front seats and a side door that can't be opened from the inside — these don't exactly come standard.

The CSP is a service that picks up chronic inebriates downtown and takes them home, if a responsible adult is there, or to a treatment center.

The 2010 E350 Econoline was donated by the Alaska Mental Health Trust, which gave \$104,000 since 2009 including the price of the vehicle.

CSP supervisor Janelle Wilhelm said she sighed in relief when the van arrived.

The former CSP van, known as CSV-1, needed to be repaired 12 times last year and was out of service for more than 30 days. Its heating system was broken, and the doors had drafts that made for a chilly ride on a winter night.

“It's still warmer than outside, but it's not a comfortable transport,” Wilhelm said.

The new van, CSV-2, legally can seat six in the back since there are six seat belts. A row of seats was removed for passengers who are better off riding on the floor.

The van has acrylic sheeting composed of small sections between the driver and passengers so it cannot be breached as easily as the last van's — which was broken by a passenger.

CSV-2 also has a rear-mounted camera for backing up. It's nearly impossible to see through the grating on the windows with a rear-view mirror.

The arrival of the van was a bright spot for CSP, which has struggled to find funding in recent years.

Downtown Association executive director David van den Berg and health trust chairman Dr. William Doolittle made appearances at Fairbanks City Council meetings requesting funds from the 2010 budget's general fund. The city set aside funding in December that likely was to go to the CSP, and \$50,000 was sent to the nonprofit last week.

That contribution put the service's operating budget in the black by \$550, a report from the Downtown Association stated.

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital donated \$45,000, and downtown land owners collectively gave \$30,000. Doyon Ltd. (\$15,000), the Downtown Association (\$15,000), the Downtown Rotary (\$750) and Anchorage Alumni (\$500) also contributed.

Councilwoman Vivian Stiver hopes to continue city funding for the CSP by drafting an ordinance that would expand the city's involvement to a five-year commitment.

Stiver said the CSP saves the city money by taking a task off the hands of the Fairbanks Police Department.

She said it also performs a valuable service by keeping people safe — both inebriates and others — and helps downtown businesses.

“It’s a community effort; everyone has a stake,” she said. “... It’s a health problem, and it’s a security problem.”

The proposed ordinance includes criteria that CSP must meet, such as its service area, to receive the funding, Stiver said.

Contact staff writer Joshua Armstrong at 459-7523.

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