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The red carpet treatment: A day just for seniors at the DMV

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Antonio Prado

Greater Wilmington DMV specialist Mark Chandler finishes up the paperwork for Victor Lockhart, of Claymont, who had his 1992 Chrysler LeBaron inspected Monday, Sept. 14. Lockhart thinks DMV's Senior Day is a good idea.

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By **Antonio Prado**
Community News

Posted Sep 30, 2010 @ 03:50 PM



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New Castle, Del. — The fastest growing population in the Diamond State is its senior population, those 60 and older, and that means more older drivers will be on the road each year.

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that Delaware will have the ninth largest percentage of elderly residents among states by the year 2030. To that end, the state should plan for projected increase in older drivers, according to the University of Delaware School of Urban Affairs' recent "Assessing the Needs of Delaware's Older Driver's" report.

Along with driving comes the requisite driver's license, car insurance, regular car inspections and eye tests – in other words, a trip to the DMV.

The Delaware Division of Motor Vehicles is starting the process of addressing the needs of the state's growing mature population with a pilot program just for seniors, DMV Director Jennifer L. Cohan said. Namely, the Dover DMV will roll out the red carpet for its more mature customers with its inaugural Senior Day scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 2.

Seniors may not always view the Division of Motor Vehicles as friendly confines, Cohan said. For instance, some people worry the DMV will take away their license if they fail the eye exam or a driving test, Delaware Division of Motor Vehicles. That is a misnomer, she said. DMV staff does not contain doctors and only a physician or an optometrist can determine if someone's eyesight precludes him from driving.

"If you fail the test, you'll have you go to an optometrist and you have 30 days to upgrade your prescription," Cohan said. "It's a whole process you go through. We do have a medical advisory board that helps if there is conflict of information from doctors or if a customer appeals. All of this is done anonymously."

DMV plans on having all services – driver's license renewals, car registration and car inspections, Cohan said. DMV's partners for the pilot will be there as well, including AAA, AARP, the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Aging, UD and the state's Senior Driver Task Force. In addition, the Delaware Department of Transportation will present some of the new, senior friendly signage sprouting up among the state's highways and roads, including bigger stop signs.

Senior Day sounds good to Victor Lockhart, 68, of Claymont, who was at the Greater Wilmington DMV to have his 1992 Chrysler LeBaron (135,000 miles) inspected for the second time on Monday, Sept. 14. This time, his car passed the emissions test.

If You Go

WHO Senior Day at the Division of Motor Vehicles

WHERE Dover DMV
WHEN 9 a.m.-Noon Saturday, Oct. 2

WHAT DMV will offer all regular services from driver's license renewals to car inspections. In addition, staff from AAA, AARP, the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Aging, Delaware State Police, the state Office of Highway Safety, the University of Delaware, the Delaware Transit Corporation and the Delaware Department of Transportation will provide demonstrations or be on hand to answer any questions.

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"I like it because it shouldn't be like you're visiting the dentist when you come to the DMV," Lockhart said.

Indeed, DMV's Senior Day is all about the first class customer service everyone craves no matter where they go, said Kathy Stevenson, lane manager at the Greater Wilmington DMV.

“We’re trying to do everything we can to make people at ease,” Stevenson said. “We’re all approaching senior day so it’s nice to see a government agency that recognizes this and puts a value on our seniors and wants them to be treated in a first class way.

“We have a lot of new people moving to our state; it’s very attractive for people to retire here,” Stevenson said. “And sometimes, coming into the Division of Motor Vehicles is a big hurdle for some folks. So, this is going to be a more comfortable atmosphere where we can explain the different requirements and help them along with the process – vehicle inspections, the new secure driver’s license.”

One of the neat things about senior day will be the “Car Fit” demonstration by AARP, Cohan said. It will include a review of whether drivers know how to use all the controls in their cars, how to properly set mirrors – things people might not know in a new car or because they are not comfortable changing things.

The UD School of Urban Affairs will also be on hand to give out information regarding Healthy Communities and Senior Driver research and safety, Assistant Professor Bernard Dworsky said. (When asked who are safer drivers, teenagers or seniors, Dworsky said seniors without hesitation.)

While 17 percent of Delaware drivers are seniors, they are only involved in 14 percent of fatal crashes, Cohan said.

“Seniors are the most self regulated group we have,” she said. “They don’t tend to drive when they’re not comfortable– at night, in the rain or on highways they’re not familiar with. Our concerns are not about their driving ability. We want to meet their needs in the best way. That’s our concern.”

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