

SNOQUALMIE VALLEY RECORD

Taking care of people: North Bend Citizen of the Year builds transportation solutions for the Valley

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As the director of Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, Biggs has, for the past several years, been the force behind the on-demand shuttle service that connects North Bend, Snoqualmie and Fall City people with the places they need to go, plus the semi-regular circulator bus routes that don't require reservations, and the Metro-replacing bus runs that go up and down the Valley every 90 minutes.

She'll deny it, though.

"Our drivers are so cool," she said in a recent conversation, unaware of her impending honor. Credit for the success of all three transportation programs goes to the 12 drivers (they're hiring a relief driver) and four schedulers who run the system every day.

"They're not just giving people rides, they're taking care of them, on a daily basis," Biggs said. "They're amazing. They were amazing before I got here."

Biggs moved to North Bend in 1997. In 2012, she volunteered her talents in human resources and transportation management to the transportation program, to write transportation grant applications for the program, started in 2003 under the umbrella of the Mount Si Senior Center. She became the program's director July 1, 2013.

At the time, the on-demand shuttle was the only service the group could offer, and even that had been reduced as outside funding was reduced repeatedly. Fares were raised, from 50 cents per ride, and only a handful of buses were running, on limited hours. As the director, Biggs prioritized securing funding, primarily from Metro and the Snoqualmie Tribe, plus King County and few others, to build up the \$1 a ride bus services now available.

Now, SVT runs about 10 buses, moving 35,000 people annually, and covering more than 10,000 miles in the Valley. The annual budget is about \$900,000.

Biggs also worked, as did the rest of the staff, on reducing the cost of trips for the on-demand shuttle. They built and rebuilt schedules, and tried various suggestions, in an effort that continues today, but has already produced results.

She proudly points out that between February and August of this year, the service increased the number of rides provided, from 1,188 to 2,187, and the number of rides given per hour, from 1.6 to almost 3, while reducing the miles travelled per trip, thanks to schedule consolidation and the circulator buses. In that same period, SVTs cost to provide a ride dropped to nearly half, from \$41.78 per ride, to \$23.94.

It's just the start of Biggs' plans for the program.

"Our goal is to be a part of a conversation (with cities, the county, the Snoqualmie Tribe and other stakeholders) in which we create a long-term strategic plan for sustainable transportation,"

she said. On a document in front of her, Biggs points to these words, “Fact: By the year 2040, one out of every five people will be over the age of 65.”

“Our goal is *that*,” she says. “Are we ready for that? One out of five people who may need transportation?”

The answer right now is no, she says, but they can be ready, which is why she’s focused on it now.

“With transportation, it’s kind of like ‘If you build it, they will come,’” she said. “And the better the system, the more economic development follows.”

First, though, the program needs some development of its own. Biggs said SVT is working on a proposal to, with city approval, move the senior center’s popular thrift store into a temporary, but expanded location next to the senior center. This move would allow SVT staff, currently sharing one office and work areas in the lobby of the senior center, to take over the thrift store area for offices.

Learn more about the on-demand shuttle, the circulator bus, or the Valley Shuttle programs at <http://www.svtbus.org>.

Award

In announcing the Citizen of the Year honor, North Bend Mayor Ken Hearing said:

I am always excited to name the North Bend Citizen of the Year. As most of you know the Citizen of the Year award is meant to be given to an individual or business that has gone above and beyond to make North Bend a better place to live, through professional or volunteer efforts, or by an extraordinary contribution to the community. We want to honor those who have shown, through their initiative and actions that they truly care about the community and whose hard work, spirit and dedication make our community great.

In the process of reviewing this year’s nominated individuals one person stood out as deserving special recognition for giving generously of her own time to ensure that the Valley remains a beautiful, happy, healthy place to live and continues to be connected to areas outside the valley.

There are countless stories that could be told about her good works, but for the sake of time here tonight I will highlight only a few of our recipient’s accomplishments.

This year’s recipient works for a local non-profit organization serving every citizen in the valley.

She has been described as a problem solver, big picture thinker and someone you can count on to go above and beyond the call of duty.

She currently serves on the board of directors for Snoqualmie Valley Community Network and acts as an advocate for those in our community who cannot advocate for themselves. She has brought her expertise to the Networks' Development Impact Group which works to ensure the organization stays financially solid and capable of working to prevent youth suicide and substance abuse. Additionally, she regularly contributes to the Key Leaders Summit and the Leading the Way to a Sustainable Snoqualmie Valley events.

She enjoys interacting with youth in the valley and recently participated on an employer panel which provided meaningful conversations with local teens about what employers look for when hiring.

She has been a member of the Snoqualmie Valley Gardening Club for 13 years and currently serves as president. During her time with the club she established the Snoqualmie Valley Gardening Club scholarship fund using proceeds from their yearly plant sales. To date, the fund has awarded more than \$6,000 to graduating seniors at Mount Si High School.

She is responsible for establishing "Burt's Garden Helpers" which provides gardening assistance to those unable to attend to their gardens in the community.

She serves as director of transportation at the Mount Si Senior Center and runs Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, which provides door-to-door service to residents in the community with a simple call and reservation. Prior to this, she worked as a volunteer at the senior center and had donated hundreds of hours of her time before her current staff position was created.

In her current position she manages 17 people and a multi-million dollar budget. She has worked tirelessly to ensure all members of the community, including our local youth, continue to have access to reliable public transportation by working diligently to secure needed funds for this vital valley service.

Additionally she strives to foster a beneficial relationship with Metro and King County officials to ensure the Snoqualmie Valley has a voice in the county's decisions about transportation funding.

These are just a few of her accomplishments that have enriched and impacted our lives over the last several years. By now most of you know who she is and we are so proud know her and call her our friend. We can't thank her enough for all she has given to our community.