

From the Commissioner, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

By Charlotte Arbogast, Senior Policy Analyst

### **2023 Commonwealth Council on Aging Best Practices Awards**

Established by the General Assembly, the Commonwealth Council on Aging advises the Governor on issues affecting older Virginians. Through the annual Best Practices Awards, the Council acknowledges organizations whose innovative programs can be replicated across the Commonwealth. In reviewing nominations for this recognition, the Council evaluates nominees based on community impact, potential for replication, innovation, outcomes, and promotion of aging in the community.

This year, METGo!, a free, same-day ridesharing service in Big Stone Gap, won the \$5,500 first place Best Practices Award. Launched in June 2021 by Mountain Empire Older Citizens, the program meets an unserved need for same-day ride options.

"MEOC is very excited that METGo! has been selected as first-place winner for this best practices award," said Mountain Empire Transit Director Mitch Elliott. "We are very proud of this cutting-edge service. METGo! makes it simple and easy for riders, including older adults and individuals with disabilities, to schedule safe, reliable, on-demand transportation at their convenience."

In its first full year, METGo! provided 39% of MEOC trips within its 1,390-square-mile service area and completed over 40,000 trips for more than 8,000 unique riders. Over 26,000 of these trips were provided to older adults or individuals with disabilities. METGo! averages close to 200 rides per day.

Joyful Voices Chorus of Midlothian earned the second-place award of \$3,500. For the past five years, Joyful Voices has touched more than 40 singers with Alzheimer's and other dementias and their caregivers. The chorus regularly rehearses and performs concerts locally. "Music is powerful, and people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia can enjoy and excel at singing even when unable to do other things," said Artistic Director Joanne Sherman.

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Richmond received the third-place award of \$2,500 for its Live Active, Live Healthy, Live Modern Senior Retreat or "LIVE" Program. This one-week retreat for older adults experiencing vision loss helps them to cope and adjust to daily activities to continue to live independently. Held at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired, the Live Program has served over 90 older Virginians the past five years to learn about assistive technology, nutrition, recreation, and wellness.

The following programs also received honorable mentions:

- Fairfax Area Agency on Aging's Caregiver Alert Notifications Program
- Community Foundation of the New River Valley's Aging in Community Leadership Team
- Piedmont Senior Resources Area Agency on Aging's Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Program

"As we celebrate Older Americans Month [in May], we recognize the innovative services tailored to promote self-determination, social engagement and education for older adults and/or caregivers, allowing them to stay vital and active members of the community," said the Council's Best Practices Committee Chair Debbie Preston. "Congratulations to all the 2023 Best Practice awardees and honorable mentions for a job well done."

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Since announcing the results, the Council held on-site recognition ceremonies for each winning program as well as a virtual webinar along with the Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging to highlight the winners.

Dominion Energy has graciously provided financial sponsorship for the Best Practices Awards since 2012. This year, AARP Virginia also joined on as a sponsor for the awards. The Council is grateful for Dominion Energy and AARP Virginia for their commitment to this endeavor.

To learn more about this year's Best Practices Award winners or the Council, please visit <https://vda.virginia.gov/boardsandcouncils.htm>.