

Super citizen receives help getting back on the road

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — On a recent sunlit Friday afternoon, 85-year-old Carol Sabia of Branford drove off the Midtown Motors car lot in a 2004 Jeep Liberty to a round of cheers from a small group of well-wishers. She was on her way to shop for a friend.

Even before public health experts pronounced people 65 years or older at high risk for COVID-19 and recommended they stay in their homes, geriatric specialists like Gary J. Kennedy, MD were maintaining that those who have reached their 80s should consider giving up driving due to “slowed response time and trouble with visual acuity.”

Sabia, though, “is no ordi-

nary 85-year-old,” said her friend Judy Barron, CDR’s executive director and founding member of a volunteer group that uses the hashtag #itswhatwedo to signal its dedication to inspiring citizens to take time to volunteer in their communities.

“We created the hashtag because we want the act of helping people in need to become second nature,” said co-founder Ken Engelman.

A long-time community volunteer, Sabia, a grandmother of five and great grandmother of three, currently serves as the head cook for the Community Dining Room’s Homebound program in Northford, preparing 44 meals each week. She also drives friends to doctors’ appointments and helps with their shopping

and errands.

Until she needed a new gas tank for her 2000 Mercury Grand Marquis last month, that is. The cost itself was a non-starter.

“I always had a car, and for the first time in years, I had no way to get around, and had to depend on other people, which I didn’t like,” said Sabia, who attributes her get-up-and-go to an early childhood raised on fresh food and without modern conveniences on Snake Hill Road, a unstinting work ethic that has her up at 5 a.m. each day, and a passion for helping people.

“Having a car is essential to her life, and she was pretty lost without it,” Barron said.

Enter volunteer #itswhatwedo, which includes Bar-

ron, Engelman, Tabitha Brown, Diane Pappacoda, and John “Cadillac” Seville.

With the wealth of experience in community support boasted by its members, the group’s mission is to “offer advice and creative ideas to get people volunteering in their communities to make them a better place for all,” Engelman said.

He added that the group, which finds its inspiration in Branford community icons like Eunice Lasala, Dan Cosgrove Sr., and Bill O’Brien, has as its core principles “kindness, compassion, and understanding.”

Upon learning of Sabia’s plight, the members sprang into action. “It was a no-brainer,” Barron said. “Having a vehicle helps Carol spread joy to others in need.”

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Contributed photo

From left, Ken Engelman, John Saville, Judy Barron, J. Rivera of Midtown Motors, Carol Sabia, Midtown Motors owner Tom Ferraiolo, and Tabby Brown.

They took her to Midtown Motors, where they lit upon the used Jeep for \$1,500. Then they learned Sabia had little savings and unexpected bills to clear.

So the group posted a Venmo appeal on Facebook. Within days, they were approaching their goal.

Though they didn’t quite meet their mark, as Barron acknowledged, they came close enough for Midtown Motors owner Tom Ferraiolo to cut Sabia a break.

“She volunteers and helps people and is just a good person all the way around,” he said, as he handed Sabia the keys. “Anyone who goes above and beyond to help people like that, I can’t turn away.”

Sabia shook her head, temporarily speechless. “I’m overwhelmed,” she finally said. “There is so much kindness in our world.”

For more information, visit “volunteer #itswhatwedo” on Facebook.