

SOUTHAMPTON / EAST HAMPTON

Free van rides to see doctors

Latino-focus plan helping residents to run through April

BY VERA CHINESE
vera.chinese@newsday.com

An East End Latino advocacy organization is launching a free transportation program to help residents get to pediatric and other doctor appointments.

The nonprofit Organización Latino-Americana of Eastern Long Island will focus its efforts on transporting those who have appointments to see pediatricians, but rides would be available to any Latino resident who does not qualify for Suffolk County Accessible Transportation, as well as non-Latinos who need assistance in some circumstances.

The rides will be available in Southamptton and East Hampton towns on Monday, Wednesday and Friday through April, said Minerva Perez, the group's executive director. No starting date has been set yet and the schedule may shift.



Minerva Perez of Organización Latino-Americana of Eastern Long Island, the group spearheading the transportation effort.

Advocates said the service is needed on the South Fork, where county bus service is sporadic and where it can take hours to travel short distances. Residents also may be undocumented or unlicensed and thus avoid driving, Perez said.

"The fear around transportation is real," she said.

Two donations will allow the nonprofit to start the program. Laura Solinger and her husband, Steven Muth, of Sag Harbor donated their 2005 seven-seat minivan, and an anonymous donor gave \$15,000. That money paid for vehicle insurance, registration and the hiring of a driver, Perez said.

Solinger said she was inspired to get involved with Organización Latino-Americana after hearing Perez speak at the private Hayground School in Bridgehampton, where her youngest child is a student.

"I think they're doing great work for the community," Solinger, a defense attorney, said of the decision to donate the van. "The community needs to know they have the support of a lot of people."

Byrony Freij, a Spanish-speaking therapist who offers counseling at East End Pediatrics in East Hampton, has seen the challenges the Latino population faces in traveling to get medical treatment. Some households have only one car, usually in use during the day, she said. Sometimes children will miss school because they must be dropped off early for their appointment. She also pointed to the difficulty public transit poses for mothers taking their newborns to pediatrician visits when they are still recovering from childbirth.

The trip from Springs to her East Hampton office, normally a 15-minute drive, can take

more than two hours by bus, with much of that time spent waiting for transfers, Freij said.

"It's a huge relief," she said of having a van available. "I've mentioned it to some of my patients who have been eagerly waiting for something like this to come along. But it's a shame that it has to be a nonprofit that is bringing this forth" rather than a government agency, she added.

Legis. Bridget Fleming (D-Noyack) said although she is happy to see Organización Latino-Americana provide the service, she hopes the county can adjust its bus routes in the future to better serve the community. Suffolk County cut eight money-losing routes last year, including three on the South Fork, and bus routes haven't been changed in three decades, she said.

"It's not a long-term solution," Fleming said. "We're working on the long-term solution."

Riders can call Organización Latino-Americana at 631-899-3441 to schedule rides or to learn whether they are eligible for the program.

HEMPSTEAD TOWN / ISLAND PARK

CALL FOR NEW POWER PLANT STUDY

BY JOHN ASBURY
john.asbury@newsday.com

Hempstead Town and Island Park officials are calling on the Long Island Power Authority to commission a new study on repowering the E.F. Barrett Power Plant in Island Park.

Island Park school officials and the Hempstead receiver of taxes said that property taxes in Island Park and the unincorporated hamlets of Barnum Island and Harbor Isle could double for some homes and increase on average \$3,000 if LIPA's challenge of its tax assessment is reduced by 90 percent.

LIPA is challenging the tax assessment of Barrett Plant for \$42.6 million, which is subsidized by LIPA customers. LIPA officials said tax payments make up between 15 percent and 17 percent of customer utility bills.

A study last year by PSEG Long Island found that there was not the supply demand or need to repower Barrett or a power plant in Port Jefferson. The study also recommended scrapping a \$2.9 billion plant in Yaphank. A separate study is planned this year for the Northport plant, for which LIPA is challenging the Town of Huntington on an \$80 million tax assessment.

LIPA forecasts that Long Island's power demand will decline over the next decade before marginally increasing by 2035.

Hempstead Councilman Anthony D'Esposito and Receiver of Taxes Donald Clavin called on LIPA to convert the 1956 Barrett steam power plant to a clean natural gas facility. Officials also called on the Nassau County Department of Assessment to oppose the tax assess-



Rosmarie Bovino, at mic, Councilman Anthony D'Esposito, with flag on jacket, and Donald Clavin, above, discussed the E.F. Barrett Power Plant in Island Park on Wednesday. Video: newsday.com/nassau

ment challenge. Town officials said LIPA had agreed not to challenge its assessment in 1997.

"I hope everyone realized LIPA represents 47 percent of taxes in Island Park schools," Is-

land Park Superintendent Rosmarie Bovino said. "Every homeowner will probably have their taxes doubled."

LIPA officials said they could not comment on the town's pro-



posals, given pending litigation, but noted that LIPA has offered settlements in other communities such as Port Jefferson to ease the tax burden over a 10-year tax ramp-down.