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The Good News Mountaineer garage is on a Roll

LaTanya Davis was riding eight buses a day to take her twenty month old son to daycare and herself to work in Charleston, WV. "We had to leave our house at six in the morning and didn't return home until almost eight at night." Davis described her daily commute.

Now, thanks to the Good News Mountaineer Garage (GNMG) and Debbie Corbett of Charleston, WV, DAVIS drives to work each day in a 1991 Dodge Spirit. The car had been in the Corbett family for a long time and had seen Mrs. Corbett's son through four years at WVU. When he graduated and bought a new car, the family decided to give their car to someone who really needed it.

The car was in good condition and LaTonya Davis was thrilled to get it. "I feel truly blessed!" she said. "Now so much weight has been lifted off me. I can stop planning my life around the bus schedule."

Davis is one of the more than eighty women who have received a car from the Good News Mountaineer Garage since October, 2001. This new non-profit agency was started in 2001 by a group of West Virginians who wanted to help West Virginia families get to work and training so they could get off welfare.

Terrill Ellis of Charleston was one of the founders. Ellis runs a community and economic development consulting firm and wanted to help other women get past the transportation barrier that prevents them from working and supporting their families.

"I wanted to make welfare reform work in West Virginia." Ellis said. "Welfare has changed so much over the last few years-the emphasis now is on getting people to work and off public assistance. And let's face it, in most of West Virginia, getting to work means owning a car." A recent study by the West Virginia University Research Task Force on Welfare Reform confirmed that one out of four families on assistance were unable to get a job or take advantage of job training because they did not have a vehicle.

The idea behind the GNMG is simple. The Garage accepts donated cars, fixes them up and sells them for one dollar to families who are referred by the West Virginia Department of Human Services. The GNMG has been very pleased with the response from the community.

"We have received donated cars from Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland but most of our cars come from right here in West Virginia." said Barbara Bayes, GNMG executive director. "Many of our donors are women-they may know what it's like and want to help out."

Jill Miles, Deputy Attorney General (Consumer Protection and Anti-Trust Division) found that donating her 1991 Toyota Tercel to the Good News Mountaineer Garage was also a sound financial decision.

"By the time you combine the state tax credit and the federal charitable deduction, it's not like you are giving the car away at all." Miles explained. "We ended up getting as much out of the car as we would have if we'd traded it in."

The tax advantages vary depending on the value and condition of the vehicle and whether state tax credits are available when the car is donated. The Good News Mountaineer receives a limited number of state tax credits from the West Virginia Development Offices' Neighborhood Investment Program each year and awards them on a first come first serve basis.

Miles felt that the biggest advantage was the satisfaction of knowing that her car was out on the road making a difference for a West Virginia family. While getting someone to work is the main reason a family needs a car, they change lives in other ways too.

Bayes described a phone call she received from a woman who had just received a car from the GNMG "She said she almost cried when she overheard her son on the phone to his friend. He was

saying 'No, my mom will pick you up for the game in our car.' And she realized how it must have felt for him all those years having to always be the one who asked for a ride."

For more information about the Good News Mountaineer Garage call 1-866-GIVE CAR or check out their website at www.goodnewsmountaineergarage.com.