

Medical transport firm 'raising standards'

By [Carl Orth](#) | The Suncoast News

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A unique Father's Day gift for an aging parent might be a ticket to ride.

Transportation vouchers could be just the thing to help a frail, elderly parent, Express Medical Transporters owner Jeanine Blake suggests.

The Clearwater-based company expanded into Pasco this year with daily routes round the clock in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties.

Failing eyesight, hearing loss, or even the high cost of gas can keep a senior citizen from getting out, company spokeswoman Tara Michelle Hustedde added.

Budget cutbacks could force public transit to reduce service, Hustedde pointed out.

So EMT can fill a need for people who are unable to drive to and from important doctor appointments, specialized treatment facilities such as dialysis and cancer therapies, dental appointments or other location.

"This is a business that is a need, not a want," Blake commented. "It never goes out of style. I help people every day and that makes me feel warm and fuzzy."

EMT works with Medicaid and Transportation Disadvantaged programs, many insurance companies and also accepts private pay.

Unlike other services, EMT does not use a taxicab model in which drivers are independent contractors, Blake explained.

Instead, EMT employs more than 20 full-time drivers on staff and owns all 20 vehicles in its fleet. EMT has wheelchair accessible vans, minivans, sedans and even buses.

"We're kind of raising the standard," Blake remarked.

Because of extensive training, EMT drivers often have earned high praise after transporting individuals, Blake emphasizes.

The company boasts a 98 percent satisfaction rating, she said.

Pasco County still attracts many retirees, so EMT gravitated to expanding here to fill a need, Blake said.

The firm became the only provider approved to operate in three counties in more than 40 years, Blake previously noted.

Often a Pasco resident might have to travel to a doctor's office in a neighboring county, so EMT can crisscross between counties, unlike other transportation services. The firm is branching into Hernando County as well.

Business is so brisk EMT could double within a year, Blake predicts.

Right now EMT completes about 90 trips per day, with Pasco County accounting for about 10 percent to 12 percent of the trips. In the near future, Blake predicts Pasco County could account for about one-fourth of trips by EMT drivers.

The Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida estimates the potential transportation disadvantaged population in Florida could grow to more than 8.25 million by 2015 and that they will need more than 15.7 million trips a year, company officials note.