Great Rivers 211 Carrier Alert Program

La Crosse Tribune, 07/19/2023

The Great Rivers 211: Carrier Alert Program is changing how mail carriers can look after people who might need extra help in the community.

Imagine a mail carrier, who visits your house almost every day, also checking in on your elderly neighbor or the kid down the street with special needs. That’s exactly what Great Rivers 211 in Wisconsin is all about. It’s an innovative way to use something ordinary, such as mail delivery, to do something special and important — ensuring people in the community are safe and well.

A partnership between Great Rivers 211 and the U.S. Post Office, the program offers a free solution for those who may be unable to get help if they fall or have a medical event. It’s available for people living in their own homes in La Crosse County and other communities in the Great Rivers 211 service region.

Once enrolled, the resident receives a sticker for their mailbox alerting their mail carrier they’re in the program. Then if the resident doesn’t collect their mail, the carrier alerts 211, which will check on them and send emergency contacts or emergency services if needed.

Carla Lundeen is director of Great Rivers 211.

**How has enrollment in the program changed over the past 10 years?**

Participation in the Carrier Alert program has declined over the past several years. Many factors likely led to this decline, such as personal emergency response systems and people moving to assisted-living facilities. But the largest reason is a declining lack of awareness. When the Carrier Alert program first started back in 1984, serving only La Crosse County, there were as many as 100 members. Now, we have about 20 participants.

Our goal is to work hard this summer to get the word out about the program. Even if someone has a personal emergency response system or carries a cell phone, there are times when they might not be able to use it. The Carrier Alert program provides an extra layer of security and peace of mind to the person and their family that someone will check on them if they don’t collect their mail the previous day.

**If you could have a celebrity spokesperson for the local Carrier Alert program, who would you choose?**

Denzel Washington would be a perfect spokesperson for Carrier Alert. He has a straightforward, honest delivery and a demeanor that encourages trust. He speaks clearly and thoughtfully and seems to have great follow-through. The Carrier Alert program is like that. It is a program offered free of charge and supported by two trusted community organizations: the United States Post Office and Great Rivers 211.

Denzel would be the ideal spokesperson to share that anyone, including people who are elderly or have a disability, can live well and for a long time in their own homes with the right support plan. The Carrier Alert program can be a key part of that plan! And, like Denzel, 211 call specialists are warm, welcoming, and respectful when connecting with people. Great Rivers 211 provides that caring and confidential service 24 hours a day.

**Can you describe a specific situation where Carrier Alert worked just as it should?**

Great Rivers 211 has seen many instances over the years where a build-up of mail caused the mail carrier to set the Carrier Alert process in motion. Thankfully, all the instances had happy endings! Most often, people had forgotten to tell their mail carrier that they will be gone for a few days and not picking up their mail. These examples prove how well the system works.

The Carrier Alert program does not replace other safety options like carrying a cell phone or wearing a personal emergency response system device. But, like a strong safety net, it does provide extra support in case those two options are not available. And, for people who may not have access to other options, Carrier Alert provides a line of connection, support, and safety and is available at no cost.