

Special DELIVERY



JUNE 2021 NEWSLETTER



A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Hopefully, by the time you receive this newsletter, Covid-19 restrictions should be lifted in California. For most of us, it means getting closer to life as we knew it, seeing friends and family, going out to dinner, and returning to an office or going back to work. Families who stood in food lines should now be able to buy food, but unfortunately vulnerable seniors won't be able to bounce back like the rest of us.

Many seniors depend on Meals on Wheels Diablo Region for the only meal they will eat all day, and the volunteer who delivers the meal is often is the only person they will see all day. These seniors are the hidden hungry who live in our neighborhoods, and are isolated and homebound with only a fragile support system.

One lesson the pandemic taught us at MOW Diablo Region was that there are more seniors who should have been receiving meals before Covid-19 and will be needing meals long after. We also saw that some older adults require more help to remain at home safely.

In this edition of Special Delivery, you'll learn about some of the new programs we began to address hunger and isolation. You'll meet the people who make these programs possible so seniors can continue to live at home with dignity. You'll also hear from a client who turned to MOW Diablo Region in a time of need and how our Care Management Team was able to assist with an issue that affects so many seniors. We hope you enjoy reading about the people who inspire us to make sure our seniors remain healthy and independent for as long as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Caitlin Sly".

Caitlin Sly
Executive Director



life THROUGH THE EYES OF AN Artist

Yoshi dreamed of a new life, so he left Japan in 1969 to complete his art studies in the United States. His talent and passion led him to become a university art instructor, as well as a sought-after artist. Yoshi's etchings have been acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in San Francisco, and the Brooklyn Museum.

Last year, Yoshi's husband of 50 years passed away and, with no other family, he found life had become more challenging at 79 years old. He could not drive so getting to the supermarket and preparing a meal was more difficult. He had trouble navigating the frustrating tasks of changing his credit card number, making a dentist appointment or trouble-shooting computer issues. Yoshi never felt sorry for himself, but when his neighbors suggested Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, he was pleased to be connected to Nick Weber from MOW Diablo Region's Care Management team.

Yoshi began receiving delivered meals, but Nick could tell Yoshi needed additional help. Because we are the only Meals on Wheels in the County that provides wraparound services to seniors, our Care Management staff helps those who are experiencing many of the challenges seniors face as they age. They help seniors deal with depression, eviction, filling out forms, long term care planning, and sometimes even elder abuse.

"Yoshi's situation is not uncommon," says Nick. "The loss of a spouse not only results in loneliness, but the end of a lifelong support system. The partner who was always there to help solve everyday tasks and challenges is no longer by your side. It can be overwhelming on so many levels."

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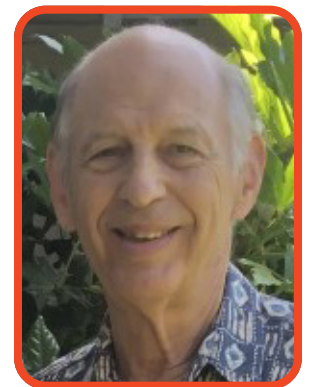
NO LAUGHING MATTER

When Ray tells a story, it is usually sprinkled with jokes. After almost 50 years of marriage, he still calls his wife, Betty, his girlfriend. But Ray is serious when he talks about how he got involved with Meals on Wheels Diablo Region and why he continues to donate. He heard about the organization in 2010 when his "girlfriend" began volunteering at MOW Diablo Region's Walnut Creek C.C. Café. Ray thought it was a great organization with an essential mission.

As a donor, Ray was pleased when he found himself turning to MOW Diablo Region for help with a relative. His cousin and his wife were only eating fast food, weren't taking care of their health, and needed help connecting to social services. "I remember going into the MOW Diablo Region office in Walnut Creek," says Ray. "They were so helpful and knew exactly what my cousin and his wife needed. It made a difference in helping them remain at home and gave me peace of mind."

Many of the seniors who receive delivered meals and services are Ray's age. Some are people in his neighborhood he has known for years. Ray is lucky he has his "girlfriend," children, and grandchildren nearby, and he is healthy enough to remain active and be able to drive.

"Getting food is always a problem for some seniors, but when Covid-19 hit, I knew things would get a lot worse," says Ray. He increased his gift to MOW Diablo Region because he knew we are delivering meals to 40% more clients. "I could help out a little more, so I decided I should. Seniors are having a tough time and they shouldn't have to go hungry," concludes Ray.



ONE LESS WORRY

How A Grocery Delivery Service Also Delivers Peace of Mind

For 69-year-old Kathleen, her weekly walk to the nearby grocery store in Oakley became exhausting – especially during the warmer months. The walk back was the hardest, hauling the heavy grocery bags. Then the pandemic hit, and like many others, Kathleen didn't feel safe making her grocery store trips.

For low-income seniors, the Covid-19 crisis added another worry: rising food prices. Seniors are among our most vulnerable neighbors, and those who were at risk of going hungry before the pandemic found it even harder to plan their next meal with Covid-19 prevention measures in place.

Fortunately, the staff at Meals on Wheels Diablo Region had already planned to start a program that would deliver nutritious groceries to food-insecure seniors. "It's one less thing they have to worry about," says Grocery Bag Program Coordinator, Casey Claibourne. "Having this program in place frees up resources for other vital needs, like paying the electric bill."

The Grocery Bag Program delivers groceries to vulnerable seniors twice a month. Each bag comes with a canned protein like chicken, beef, or ham, along with canned vegetables and fruit. The bags also includes other nourishing foods like eggs, pasta, bread, milk, cheese, soup, and oatmeal. Each bag is intended to serve 16 meals. This initiative is a joint effort between MOW Diablo Region and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano and was made possible by a grant from the Crescent Porter Hale Foundation.



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A FAMILY AFFAIR

What would you do if you had unlimited time? Learn a new language? Pick up a long-forgotten instrument? Write a book? When the world changed dramatically in March 2020, the Keane family decided to use their extra time to give back to the community.

Shelter-in-place forced Meals on Wheels Diablo Region to reorganize its five C.C. Café lunch sites to make sure seniors still got the food they need. Carol and John Keane of Concord had time and saw the pandemic as an opportunity to serve. "We read on social media that the Café sites couldn't serve a sit-down meal and there was a need for volunteers to deliver. We reached out to help," says Carol.

Carol and John began with the Café deliveries, and day after day they continued showing up to help. Like many Americans, their eldest son, Danny, was laid off from his job as a result of the pandemic, and their youngest son, Joey was forced to return home from school and continue with distance learning. Danny and Joey both decided to use their extra time to serve as well, joining their parents to make daily meal deliveries. The pandemic that disrupted so many families gave the Keane family a chance to connect and serve together.

One year later, and the Keanes are still showing up. Though Danny is back at work and Joey is back in school, they still find time to pitch in when needed. Carol and John continue to make deliveries and are now a part of MOW Diablo Region's new Friendly Helper Program, which assists seniors with their daily errands, such as grocery shopping

and picking up medications at a local pharmacy. "We recognized that older seniors were depending on younger seniors to run errands for them," says Cynthia Black, Health and Wellness Division Manager. "With younger seniors sheltering-in-place, MOW Diablo Region created the Friendly Helper Program to meet the growing needs."

Carol and 82-year-old client, Thea, were paired together and have become close friends. "Thea's adult children live in Florida," says Carol. "She relies on me." Carol drives Thea to doctor appointments, does grocery shopping for her, and picks up her prescriptions. "I know these services provide peace of mind for out-of-town relatives who know their loved ones are cared for. It also offers that same sense of security for the senior to know MOW Diablo Region is there to help."

If you are interested in becoming a Friendly Helper visit <https://www.mowdiableregion.org/get-involved> or call us at 925.954.8736.





MEALS ON WHEELS
DIABLO REGION

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LIFE THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ARTIST

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Yoshi says he is so appreciative of the assistance provided by MOW Diablo Region and is especially grateful to Nick. “Nick is a very responsible person,” says Yoshi. “The people I have been associated with from MOW Diablo Region are hardworking and trustworthy. I really respect them.”

Yoshi spends time oil painting now, but he missed conversations he had with other artists. Nick turned to MOW Diablo Region’s Friendly Visitor and Caller Program, connecting Yoshi to a volunteer who is also an artist. The two have established a friendship based on a shared love of art. “For any people who are lost in this world, I recommend MOW Diablo Region,” says Yoshi. “They are kind people who I respect.”

ONE LESS WORRY

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The program launched in July 2020 in Concord and Martinez. Since then, it has expanded to Oakley, Brentwood, Pittsburg, Antioch, Bethel Island, and Walnut Creek. “This program addresses a problem many seniors face, getting access to the healthy food they need,” says Caitlin Sly, Executive Director of Meals on Wheels Diablo Region. “This is especially true during the pandemic, but it will continue as the senior population continues to grow.”

“It’s such a relief to not have to worry about going to the store,” says Grocery Bag Program recipient, Tony of Pittsburg. “And the way things have been going, it’s very much needed.” According to Claibourne, this program isn’t a temporary service. “The Program is ongoing for the next few years as funding allows.” And with additional funding, who knows how many more lives can be helped.

“One thing a lot of people aren’t aware of is that you don’t have to be an MOW Diablo Region client to qualify for this service. If you’re a homebound senior with low income, reach out to us and we’ll help,” adds Claibourne.

If you or someone you know could benefit from this service, please email Casey Claibourne at cclaibourne@mowdr.org.