



Special DELIVERY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2021



Dear Friends,

I am pleased to share with you the first official print edition of Special Delivery! While many of you may be familiar with the newsletter's online version, this quarterly print edition ensures that you'll have an in-depth look at the work we do at Meals on Wheels Diablo Region. You'll get to meet the staff and volunteers that make what we do possible, the supporters who ensure that we can continue to provide an array of services, and especially the clients who depend on us for meals and wraparound services. If we have your email, we will continue to send you electronic updates throughout the year. If you aren't receiving information from us online and would like to, please sign up for our online e-blasts by contacting Rachel Heggen at rheggen@mowdr.org.

This newsletter arrives as we mark a year since Covid-19 restrictions took effect. It has been a stressful year for seniors who have found themselves more isolated than ever before. They've worried not only about contracting the virus, but they are also concerned about how they will pick up prescriptions or a little extra food from the grocery store. Some have faced evictions, depression, and even elder abuse. For those who came to our cafés we've made meals available for pick-up or delivery, but they've lost the social connection that keeps them engaged and healthy. The same is true for the seniors who attended our exercise classes, and although we've made some classes available online, it's not the same experience as sharing that time with friends.

With all these challenges there has also been tremendous demonstration of hope and kindness from a community who offered to volunteer, drop off items, and make donations that have allowed us to keep up with the increased demand. In addition, this year highlighted the incredible commitment of our staff to meet every challenge, go the extra mile, and sometimes come up with out-of-the-box solutions in real time!

You'll get to meet some of those incredible people in this copy of Special Delivery. Their work, support, and generosity has truly inspired me. I know these stories will inspire you, too!

Sincerely,

Caitlin Sly
Executive Director

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO GIVE BACK

Frank Piacente's introduction to Meals on Wheels came 40 years ago when he was living in Hartford, CT. As an only child, Frank was working full time with a wife and two young children and did his best to care for his aging mother, Mary. "I needed some help," says Frank. "We were struggling to look after my mother, work and bring up kids. I couldn't get over to my mom's house every day to make sure she had a meal. Then someone suggested Meals on Wheels."

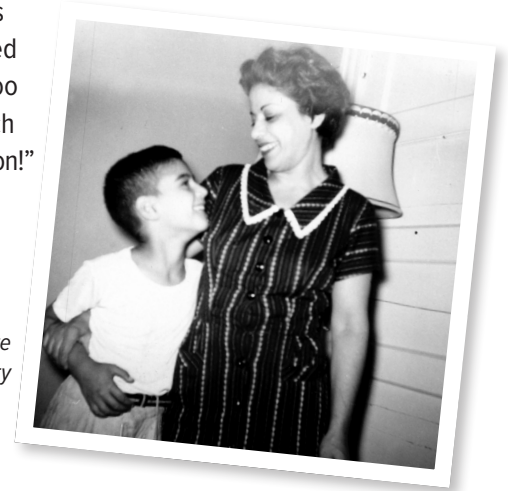
As well as the daily meal, volunteers provided a wellness check and alerted Frank if something wasn't right. "It was so helpful knowing my mom was getting a meal delivered, but also that someone was checking on her wellbeing during the day."

Frank eventually moved to Walnut Creek where he and his wife run their own business, but he remembers the meals and safety checks his mother received that allowed her to stay in her home. "I always think about those little trays of food Meals on Wheels delivered," says Frank. "I decided it was about time to help an organization that provided the same services my mom received, so I started donating to Meals on Wheels Diablo Region."

Thanks to Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, vulnerable seniors, like Frank's mom, Mary, can stay in their home, safely and with dignity.

The delivered meals and wraparound services also help adult children have peace of mind knowing that their aging parent is being fed and receiving services that help them remain healthy, whether they live close by or across the country.

Now, 40 years later, Frank also has other reasons to donate. "Everyone will go through this at one time or another, either with an elderly parent or as we age, we might need help, too," explains Frank. "Everyone faces the burden of aging and it's so important that the delivered meals and services that MOW Diablo Region provides are there when we need it. I decided it wasn't too late to give back to such an important organization!"



A young Frank Piacente with his mother, Mary

LOVE AND SERVICE: A SUCCESSFUL COMBINATION

"In the end, it's not the years in your life that counts, it's the life in your years." Michelle and Richard of Orinda are proof that Abraham Lincoln's words still stand true today. The couple has spent most of their lives serving others, and they continue to do so, even in their golden years.

It all started in 1999 in Colorado, when Michelle decided to join her husband on his Meals on Wheels route. "It's a lovely way to serve," says Michelle. After the couple made the move to the West Coast, they continued delivering meals, and for the past three years, with Meals on Wheels Diablo Region. Once a week, Michelle and Richard load up their car, then cruise down the road, making multiple stops to deliver meals. After so many years of this routine, they have their roles figured out: "I'm the driver," says Michelle. "And he greets and delivers the meals to our senior client."



Even limited interactions during the pandemic can enrich the lives of both clients and volunteers. Michelle admits that "it's an 'interesting' relationship, because you really only

exchange 6 or 8 sentences a week. One client really loves to sit and chat, so we deliver to her home last to have time for a socially distant visit. You really get to know the clients and you begin to trust each other."



All relationships are built on trust, and more than once, a senior on their route has relied on Michelle and Richard in an emergency. "A few years ago, we discovered a client had fallen. The woman had been lying on the floor all night," says Michelle. "I really felt like I was helping to save a life."

Michelle understands firsthand how hard it can be for a home-bound senior. Her grandmother and mother both received services from Meals on Wheels in New Jersey and Virginia. "I've seen how these services impact the lives of seniors. It really enables them to live longer in their home, something my mother really wanted."

Michelle and Richard are a great example of how volunteering together can strengthen a marriage! Serving others with the one you love can also lead to loving the people that you serve.

CAFÉS STILL FILL A NEED

In March 2020, everything changed. Shelter-in-place went into effect and the five C.C. Cafés operated by Meals on Wheels Diablo Region could no longer serve a sit-down meal. The hundreds of seniors who depend on the Cafés for a meal could have been left to fend for themselves, but C.C. Café Program Specialist, Bonnie Paulson, and her team would not let that happen. They immediately shifted gears to ensure Café clients would not go hungry, and within a week, MOW Diablo Region's staff and volunteers began making meal deliveries to the seniors who normally have lunch in one of the Cafés. "People were scared, and we knew it was very important they stay at home during this crisis," says Bonnie. "No matter how much things changed, we wouldn't forget them."

MOW Diablo Region is now delivering meals to 40% more seniors including the 440 people who dined at the Cafés. We recognized that the pandemic didn't just impact our clients, Bonnie and her staff realized that homeless people in East Contra Costa County needed food, too. Together, MOW Diablo Region's staff and volunteers gathered foods that did not require a microwave. "We passed out cheese, peanut butter, fruit, and water," says Bonnie. "When we see a need, we get in front of it. That's what we do."

We recognize the critical role the Cafés play in the lives of the seniors we serve. Going to the Café made them feel like they were dining in a restaurant, but it was also an important opportunity to socialize with other seniors. According to Bonnie, the Café events are a hot ticket in the senior community. "Social interaction plays a large part in the overall health of a senior. We would arrange for speakers, special goodie bags, themed parties, and activities. We brought the fun!"

Each day, MOW Diablo Region faces new challenges to ensure the needs of seniors are met. After the agency got over the initial hurdle of the pandemic, Bonnie and her team decided it was time to bring the fun back! They started Armchair Travel, an interactive online event where seniors share photos, stories, fun facts about places they have traveled. Originally an in-person Café event, this activity lifts the spirits of homebound seniors. Those that participate really seem to enjoy it, because lots of seniors who normally would attend the Cafés look forward to seeing their friends, something they haven't done since before the pandemic.

Bonnie and her staff not only pivoted quickly, but they continue to work to make sure the needs of their Café clients are met with both a meal and a way to keep them socially engaged. "It helps them understand that life will return to normal. MOW Diablo Region can make a difference and we are committed to doing just that."



*Bonnie Paulson,
C.C. Café Program Specialist*

ONE TOUGH WOMAN

At 103 years old, Faye has seen a lot in her life, and she continues to beat the odds. Born the daughter of a blacksmith in the small town of Spade, Texas, Faye has seen two World Wars, The Great Depression, and now, her second pandemic. She was too young to remember much from the 1918 Spanish Flu now that she suffers from dementia, but according to her daughter Rene, "Faye is one tough woman!"

A year into the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have suffered from the "pandemic blues," but Faye continues to be in good spirits, which may be the secret to her longevity. "We can't have many conversations anymore," says Rene, "but she still loves to play a game of dominos."

A few years ago, Rene noticed her mother was declining. "She kept forgetting how to use the microwave, and it was getting harder for her to care for herself." Rene, who works with her husband at their concrete coatings company, wanted to keep Faye at home for as long as possible. That's when she decided to reach out for

help from Meals on Wheels Diablo Region. "It's been wonderful having the support of Meals on Wheels Diablo Region. The meals are well balanced, and she eats every single bite! I've truly been impressed with the services."

Rene plans on getting her mother vaccinated so she's protected from the Covid-19 virus and can continue to beat the odds. "She truly is a miracle and I'm so blessed to still have her in my life."





MEALS ON WHEELS
DIABLO REGION

1300 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

WE ARE THERE FOR YOU, REALLY!

You may not think that you, your neighbor, or family member are eligible for delivered meals or services from Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, but you would be surprised how many people actually qualify.

Services from MOW Diablo Region are not based on income, but on need. For delivered meals you only have to be 60 years old or over, find it difficult preparing a meal, have trouble getting to the supermarket, or do not have a caretaker who prepares your meals. Getting a delivered meal is as easy as making a phone call to MOW Diablo Region at 925-937-8311.

Also, you don't have to be receiving delivered meals to be able to use our many wraparound services that help seniors remain safe and healthy at home. If you or someone you know may be concerned about falling, our Fall Prevention Program can help. Occupational Therapists will assess the home and make recommendations to prevent falling. We also provide home modifications and exercises to help with balance.

Aging can create health, social, financial, and psychological challenges for seniors, and for many they don't know who to reach out to or how. Our Care Management Program can help seniors navigate issues around depression, evictions, elder abuse or accessing other social programs that can make life easier. Our trained professionals provide confidential guidance.

Studies have suggested that loneliness is as harmful to one's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Seniors, even before

Covid-19, experienced higher incidences of isolation and loneliness than others. Our Friendly Visitor, Caller and Helper Programs offers a connection to someone who cares, someone who is there to help and fill some of the empty hours with stories and laughter.

Meals on Wheels Diablo Region is really there for you! If you or someone you know might need services, please reach out to us! Our mission is to keep seniors fed, healthy, safe and able to remain at home with dignity!

