

New Home and a Larger Mission for Meals on Wheels of Peters Township

The soup is simmering and lettuce is ready to be washed at 8:15 a.m. as kitchen volunteers start to arrive at Meals on Wheels of Peters Township. Everyone hops right to work, talking about what they watched on television last night as they chop salad materials, assemble sandwiches, and cut cakes donated from the McMurray Dairy Bar. It is a typical day at Meals on Wheels as volunteers assemble meals, but changes are fast approaching.

Meals on Wheels of Peters Township is on the move. The 34-year old community program has not only moved to a new location but is also expanding its service to more people in Peters Township and the surrounding communities due to the growing need for meal assistance in the area.

The new expansion plan is the result of research on the demographics of the area and the expectation that many more senior citizens are going to need food delivery in the next few years. Meals on Wheels is expanding now to be prepared to meet the greater need. It is estimated that in the next 5-10 years Meals on Wheels of Peters Township will be cooking and assembling up to 300 meals a day.

The new location is the completely renovated social hall of the Volunteer Fire Company at 245 East McMurray Road across from the Peters Township High School. Thanks to generous funding from CentiMark Corporation, whose employees also volunteer every Friday as drivers, the big hall has been updated with a new kitchen and redesigned with areas for food storage, office space, a volunteer lounge, and a large food preparation area for the Meals on Wheels volunteers to prepare the daily meals under the direction of cook Lisa Owens.

Meals now number in the range of 110-120 every weekday, and deliveries are made on seven routes all around the area. Outside of McMurray and Venetia, a large number are delivered to Finleyville and Canonsburg, with other deliveries going to Lawrence, Hendersonville, Muse, and the edges of Upper St. Clair, Bethel Park, Library, and Eighty Four. Daily delivery is also made to the clients of the Easter Seals

adult day care program at Peters Creek Presbyterian Church.

The mission of Meals on Wheels is to deliver a hot, nutritious meal to those who cannot cook or shop for themselves. Many of the entrees are made from scratch by the cook-including meat loaf, spaghetti and meatballs, chili, lasagna, tuna pasta salad, and Brunswick stew. Each meal includes vegetables and a salad, including a tossed salad twice a week. A new client recently commented, "I think I have eaten more vegetables in my first month on Meals on Wheels than in the whole last year!" That is definitely taken as a compliment! Meals also include soup and crackers, dessert, and milk. The meal price has remained stable at \$15.00/week or \$18.00/week for the option that includes a cold supper of a sandwich, juice, and cookie in addition to the regular meal. A diabetic option is available, and the cook also serves a number of soft diet meals at the current time for individuals with esophageal or digestive problems. Lisa Owens makes it a priority to meet the dietary needs of the clients on a daily basis.

In order to keep client costs to a minimum, Meals on Wheels relies upon generous donations from the community. Many civic groups, churches, garden clubs, and individuals have been financial supporters for many years. New donors are welcomed no matter what size the donation. Other groups offer significant contributions as well, such as the Saturday donation of a spaghetti dinner to each of our clients or the decorated and filled snow bags to send for use in case of cancellation of meal service due to inclement weather. Wonderful favors come in from dedicated crafters and school students alike. All of these are greatly appreciated by our clients.

What makes this large organization successful? "The core of Meals on Wheels is the volunteers who assist in cooking and delivering the meals," notes Director Susan Ruether. "We are building on the shoulders of those who started the program with six clients in 1974 and worked hard over the years to keep it growing." Over 130 people currently volunteer over the course of a



month. It is they who make the ~~salads and~~ sandwiches, pack the bags, ~~drive all~~ around the area, visit with clients, and report back if there are any problems. More volunteers are always needed, especially at this time of year as some of the regulars take off to winter in warmer areas.

You Can Help!

Meals on Wheels of Peters Township is

a great place to spend a few hours a week as a volunteer. Volunteers are welcomed, trained, and appreciated. As the organization grows, the need for volunteers grows apace. If you would like to join our team or are in need of meal service, please contact Susan Ruether at 724-969-1000.