

Meals on Wheels delivers food and feeling of comfort to elderly

By Mack Burke Transcript Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, October 9, 2015 7:15 am

In Norman, Meals on Wheels delivers more than 5,000 meals a month to homebound and elderly residents. More than 100 volunteers drive regular routes every week, providing sustenance and touching lives.

“Meals on Wheels is one of those agencies where you can see the direct impact of how it’s helping people,” Meals on Wheels of Norman executive director Lynn Haynes said. “You hand someone a meal and you’re immediately helping improve their life.”

After 19 years with the organization, Haynes is very familiar with the community’s needs. She said those needs are growing and her organization wants to meet that demand.

“It makes a big difference for a lot of people. The vast majority of our clients are senior citizens and they’re homebound. It’s more than just meal delivery. We contract with Norman Regional Hospital to provide the meals, that way we can do diet-specific meals. So, if someone’s diabetic, or needs a low-sodium option or can’t cut the food due, we can take care of that. 50 percent of all ailments affecting seniors can be corrected through proper diet. So, that meal is definitely important, but more than that, it’s not like the pizza guy dropping off a meal. We’ve got drivers that have been doing this for more than 30 years. They develop relationships ...”

The program has helped 72-year-old Glenna Millsap for more than four years. She suffers from leg problems that make standing in the kitchen for long stretches a tall order. Meals on Wheels delivers lunch to her home five times a week. The food is a blessing, but for Millsap and many others Meals on Wheels brings them more than just food. It brings them peace of mind.

“The drivers are very thoughtful,” Millsap said. “I know there were a few times I had forgotten to leave the ice chest on the porch and the drivers got concerned. They always call my daughter to make sure that her parents are OK. They didn’t want us to be in the house passed out, or having problems with nobody aware. They’ve been trained to do that and it makes it really handy, because it makes me feel assured.”



Nourishing body and soul

OU basketball Coach Lon Kruger chats with Grace Roley Thursday as he drops off her meal as part of Big Wheels for Meals 2012.

That's the kind of feeling that driver Linda Austin keeps coming back for. She has volunteered as a driver for Meals on Wheels since 1998. At some point, she said she just became "kind of obsessed."

"You get involved in their lives, especially on your route. The people are waiting there for that food, it's very important to them. But so is the conversation. I might be the only person they see that day."

While volunteers like Austin continue to drive the operation, funds from the United Way help ensure aging populations get nutritious meals at the lowest cost possible. A \$10 donation can provide three meals. Haynes said every dollar counts.

"They have a really good system worked out," Millsap said. "It's worked well for me and my husband."

For more information about Meals on Wheels and other partner organizations, visit unitedwaynorman.org