Meals on Wheels provides nutritious meal, security

Vera Oliver was on the front lines of Meals on Wheels when the delivery service started in Gothenburg in 1976.

She and friend and fellow Presbyterian Church member Janice Williams delivered countless numbers of meals to people for several years.

Then, meals were prepared at Gothenburg Memorial Hospital and delivered by volunteers.

Now they are cooked and picked up by volunteers for delivery from the Senior Center.

For the past two years, 94-year-old Oliver has received a hot noon meal and is grateful that the service is still available.

“I signed up because I have trouble walking,” she said, “and because my kids insisted.”

Oliver receives meals Monday through Friday. She usually has enough left over for her evening meal.

“Except when they have chicken on Thursday,” she said. “Then I eat it all at noon. I love fried chicken.”

Getting Meals on Wheels helps Oliver stay in her own home, she said, and it also provides a balanced diet.

“Otherwise I’d eat more Cheerios,” she said with a laugh.

Another important aspect of the service, Oliver said, is the security it provides.

While delivering Meals on Wheels, she encountered situations when meal recipients were in trouble.

One day, she took a meal to the front door of a woman in a wheelchair.

When Oliver opened the door, she heard the lady yelling for help.

The woman had fallen out of her wheelchair in the bathroom and couldn’t get back up.

Oliver and her husband and a neighbor helped the woman who was fortunately uninjured.

Another time, Oliver and Williams took a meal to man who lived alone and discovered that Saturday’s newspaper was still on his front step.

“We called the police,” she said.

The man had a stroke and was still alive but later died at the hospital.

Meals on Wheels board president Kendra Fecht agreed with Oliver that the service delivers a nutritious meal, a sense of security and more.

“Many times a smile at the door or a short visit will lift spirits on a tough day,” Fecht said. “It’s another line of communication.”

With a growing older population, Fecht said the need for the service will continue.

Statistics reflect that Meals on Wheels is needed.

Fecht said 7,440 meals were delivered in 2012 compared to 6,992 in 2011, representing a 448-meal increase.

The price of a meal remains the same at $4.50. Fund-raisers help defray the cost of replacing meal containers and coolers used in deliveries.

Fecht said relatives and friends can purchase Meals on Wheels for their loved ones.

“Christmas, birthdays or just ‘I care’ are great reasons for family and friends to give a gift of nutritious meals,” she said.

Qualifications to receive a meal include that the person is handicapped, or needs temporary help like recovering from surgery or injury, is a shut-in, is unable to cook or who wants and needs a good balanced meal.

Volunteer groups that deliver meals are the Evangelical Free Church, United Methodist Church,

Zion Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, The Crossing, American Lutheran Church, Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church, Trinity Lutheran Church, the Lions Club and Gothenburg Rotary Club.

During the summer, Gothenburg Public Schools teachers and staff, Gothenburg FFA and Tail Twisters 4-H Club deliver meals.

Besides Fecht, board members are Janet Evans, secretary; Jody Macek, treasurer; Angie Barkmeier, Senior Center representative; and Shannon Sell, Rita Thomalla, Charlene Devine and Deb Clark.

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