

## March for Meals national campaign kicks off March 20]



By Mike Riley

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CARE North Hastings' Meals on Wheels program is participating in the national MOW campaign again this year from March 20 to March 24. This year's campaign theme is celebrating volunteers. Nancy Richard, CNH's MOW program coordinator, and two of their volunteer MOW drivers, Nancy Baker and Lynnette Clegg, comment on this upcoming campaign.

The annual March for Meals campaign is a chance for local, not-for-profit MOW providers like CARE North Hastings to celebrate their impact and increase awareness of the availability and value of MOW in their communities. This year's campaign is happening from March 20 to 24, and celebrates the volunteers that make their good work possible.

According to CNH's executive director Jennifer Kauffeldt, 30.1 per cent of their funding for the MOW program comes from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, while the other 69.9 per cent comes from donations and from donations that come through sales at their community thrift shops. In 2022, their volunteer drivers drove 16,956 kilometres delivering meals to seniors and disabled adults, and spent 17,744 hours doing so.

Richard says that CNH's MOW program delivers hot meals to area seniors every Tuesday and Thursday, and frozen meals are delivered every second Thursday of the month. The hot meals are prepared by St. John's Anglican Church and Alice's Pantry, while the frozen meals come from Entrée Plus out of Cedar Valley, Ontario.

Baker does the MOW program's long distance runs to deliver meals, while Clegg drives meals in town and closer to town. Richard says that in addition to Baker and Clegg, Pam Shalla, Kelly Switzer, and Ron Speck also deliver meals for them.

?We would never be able to run without our volunteer girls and guys. It's a big part of it,? she says.

Baker says that she sat on the CNH board and somebody asked her if she'd start driving meals to seniors.

?I was a nurse at [Centennial] Manor here for 20 years. The elderly are in my heart. So, I said yes,? she says.

Richard says that Baker is very passionate about people getting their meals and that nobody gets missed.

?All of our drivers are superb. We can't thank them enough, we can't talk about them enough,? she says.

Clegg says she started with MOW back in Toronto around 15 years ago, before she moved up to this area.

?A group from our church was doing MOW, they encouraged me to join and I said yes because I was retired. I started there for about a year or two then we moved up here and I came in here and inquired. I was still retired and wanted to do something. Like Nancy, I enjoy doing it and I enjoy helping people,? she says.

Richard says that the OPP will be helping to promote the March for Meals campaign this year, and Bancroft Foodland will be doing a till drive from March 17 to the end of the month to help raise money for it.

Jeff Mackinnon is the staff sergeant detachment commander with the Bancroft detachment of the OPP and says that the Bancroft OPP is appreciative of the MOW program offered by CARE North Hastings.

?[It's] a great organization to have in our community. They are an excellent tool for assisting and maintaining an individual's ability to live an independent lifestyle in our rural areas,? he says.

Joe and Carol Favot, the owners of Bancroft Foodland had this to say about the upcoming till drive;

?We are happy to be able to use this facility for customers to make cash donations toward such a worthy cause,? they said.

According to Richard, the affordability of food is the biggest obstacle for seniors in the area.

?We have a lady who's a diabetic and for three or four weeks, she was eating peanut butter. She couldn't afford anything else. So that's the biggest issue with seniors right now,? she says.

Baker says the other issue is that some of the seniors can't get out to get food.

?Transportation is a big issue for people to get out. A blind man I visit can't get out so we bring him his meals. His family brings them sometimes,? she says.

While delivering meals is the main part of their job, providing a little companionship and doing wellness checks also factors into it. Baker recounts a time when one of her clients was complaining of shortness of breath, and she took his pulse and it was irregular.

?And he has a paramedic coming to check him every once in a while, and I said he should call this paramedic and he told me to do it because he can't see. I did and from that point on, he doesn't know what happened. But he ended up in the hospital and they changed his medication. There was something wrong there. So, things like that happen,? she says.

Clegg says a lot of the seniors here don't have family close by.

?So, they sit there all day long every day. So, when they see these guys, it's like ?I have to tell you all this stuff,? she says.

Baker says that a lot of seniors have cottages up here and retired here in the area.

?And I find that one of them will die. If the wife dies, the husband doesn't know how to properly cook and if the husband dies, the wife doesn't know how to load the wood into the woodstove. And they will tell you they're having a hard time doing this,? she says.

Richard says that it then gets back to the office, as Baker, Clegg and the other drivers tell them, and then they can look into doing something to help out with whatever problem they're having.

Baker emphasizes that their job isn't easy going into some of the more remote and potentially unkept roads in the area, where seniors

still need to get their meals. Richard acknowledges it is hard on the vehicles.

'They're going into these roads, they're one way or icy and stuff. But they won't not take the meals. Because they're the kind of people that are like 'we have to get [the meals] there, people depend on this.' So, they're doing it and for that I have to praise them, because it's amazing what they go through. We've had to cancel on a couple of occasions [due to inclement weather] and they weren't happy with me,' she says.

Clegg adds that the people they deliver to are as worried about the drivers' welfare as much as the drivers worry about them.

'So that's kind of nice. We've made a lot of good friends,' she says.

Richard says that a lot of the seniors they deliver to tell them things they wouldn't tell their family, as they build a good level of trust with them.

'They don't want to make [their families] upset or have the worry about them. So these guys are kind of their sounding boards,' she says.

Clegg says they feel for the people they deliver to, sometimes for years.

'Sometimes people aren't well and lo and behold, you deliver to them for a couple of years and then all of a sudden, they get sick and they pass away. And that's very emotional for us too. We've been talking to people and that kind of thing for whatever the amount of time was. It's very emotional to all of a sudden stop delivering to that person, when you have been doing it twice a week,' she says.

Richard says that they meet and talk to a lot of people who participate in the Meals on Wheels program through CARE North Hastings.

'I have to call the people [who have meals delivered] every two weeks. I just said the other day, there are people who wouldn't even talk to me, it was all they could do to tell me they needed frozen meals. Now, when I talk to them, it's like you can't even get them off the phone. All of a sudden, they know they can trust you,' she says. 'Somebody cares.'