

Motion

A MEALS ON WHEELS PEOPLE NEWSLETTER



SUMMER 2024

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Letter FROM the CEO



Scan to support our community programs for older adults.

YOUR GENEROSITY AT WORK

As the summer season unfolds, I'm filled with gratitude for your steadfast support of Meals on Wheels People's mission to enrich the lives of seniors and assist them in maintaining independence by providing nutritious food, human connections, and social support. You are the driving force behind our ability to provide healthy meals and a sense of community and connection for those we serve.

At Meals on Wheels People, we deeply value the voices of our participants. In listening to their stories and working to understand their needs, we have heard a resounding request for more opportunities to gather and connect, reducing the social isolation that many older adults face. This feedback has driven us to make exciting changes to better serve our community.

Starting July 1, we began opening many of our neighborhood dining locations additional days each week. Many locations are also opening earlier in the day, providing a warm and welcoming space for folks to drop by for coffee and socialize before having lunch. These extended hours offer more chances for social interaction and also help build a stronger, more connected community.

Social isolation is a significant challenge for many older adults. It can impact physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. By creating more opportunities for our participants to gather, we are taking meaningful steps to address this issue and enhance the lives of those we serve.

Your continued support makes it possible for us to adapt and

evolve to meet the changing needs of our participants. Together, we are creating a world where no older adult has to face the challenges of aging alone. Thank you for being a part of this journey.

Suzanne Washington
CEO, Meals on Wheels People



The Diner Vancouver:

A STORY OF INNOVATION, RESILIENCE, AND COMMUNITY

In a world where 80% of restaurants never make it past five years, The Diner in Vancouver, Washington, has defied the odds and celebrated its fifth anniversary earlier this year. But this restaurant is more than just a place to enjoy a delicious meal — it's a shining example of how innovation, resilience, and community can come together to make a real difference.

For many, Meals on Wheels People conjures images of home-delivered meals or senior center lunches. But not everyone who craves company always wants to socialize in a senior center setting. “We heard some folks say it was just too much of a stigma to go,” says CEO Suzanne Washington. “So we thought let's try something

different — maybe a type of restaurant.”

When The Diner opened its doors in 2019, it was a bold reimagining of what a Meals on Wheels dining experience could be. This classic 1950s-style restaurant is designed with accessibility in mind — from bar stools with added back support to coffee cups carefully shaped to accommodate those with arthritis and silverware with extra heft for guests with less feeling in their fingers — but there's no institutional atmosphere whatsoever.

Step inside, and you're immediately transported to a vibrant, welcoming space that feels just like any other beloved local diner. Families are gathered around booths, and a group

of local business people are hunkered over laptops. And at the classic diner counter, a warm smile from the server greets MOWP participants as they settle in for a healthy, nourishing meal — paying only what they can afford. It's an innovative dining experience where everyone is welcome.

This intergenerational mingling, dignity of choice, and flexibility of food options are at the heart of The Diner's magic. Here, the dividing lines between young and old seem to dissolve, creating a true community hub where people from all walks of life can break bread — or eat avocado toast — together.

The Diner's commitment to community doesn't stop here. We've forged partnerships with local providers like Relevant Coffee and source fresh, local ingredients whenever possible. The public can enjoy a great meal while supporting Meals on Wheels People: In lieu of accepting tips, The Diner simply asks that generous guests make a donation.



We provide our staff a living wage, excellent health and retirement benefits, and consistent schedules to provide stability and a sense of community.

“This restaurant really is the first of its kind in the nation,” Suzanne says.

RISING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Of course, The Diner’s journey has not been without its challenges. During the height of the pandemic, the restaurant was forced to pivot to a take-out service. Reopening in July 2022 was a testament to the resilience of the staff, as they adapted to the increased need for both meals and social interaction among older adults, which had only grown more acute. In 2023, The Diner was named to Eater Portland’s “Finest Diners in Portland and Beyond” list

and *Willamette Week’s* “Best of Portland 2023” list. Today, The Diner draws a steady stream of regulars whose generosity sometimes leaves the team in heartwarming awe — like the time a table left a \$500 donation to support MOWP’s mission.

One MOWP participant, Lynne, shared how The Diner has become a cherished part of her life: “There are about 10 of us, though not all of us can come each week. We love the staff. They are so nice to us. We all laugh pretty loud, so it’s always a good time with great food. Thank you for giving us our dignity since not all of us can afford a meal out anymore.”

Another success story lies in the introduction and growth of the Diners Club, which Meals on Wheels People launched in March 2023. Inspired by The Diner’s model, Diners Club partners with local restaurants, particularly

those providing ethnically diverse meal options or serving rural areas, to offer older adults even more culturally diverse culinary choices, flexible dining hours, and intergenerational socializing. Portland’s XLB and Miss Delta have signed up to be part of the Diners Club program, and efforts are ongoing to recruit more restaurants and diners into the program.

THE NEXT COURSE

The Diner and Diners Club represent bold innovations that are redefining how Meals on Wheels People nourishes the community. By providing dignified dining experiences, increasing access to nutritious meals, and fostering meaningful social connections, these programs don’t just fill bellies — they provide independence and decrease health risks associated with isolation and loneliness as well.

As we celebrate the successes of The Diner and look forward to the continued growth of Diners Club, we’re reminded that this is just the beginning. There is still so much more work to be done to combat food insecurity, social isolation, and lack of access for older adults in our community. Your support makes these vital programs possible. **Donate now to help Meals on Wheels People continue cooking up innovative solutions to ensure no senior is left behind.** ↘



mowp.org



A Decade of Nourishment:

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF MEALS 4 KIDS

On a beautiful Monday morning in June, Maritza Perez, operations manager for Meals 4 Kids, knocks on Maria's door. Maria's 7-year-old daughter peeks out excitedly as her mother accepts reusable bags filled with fresh groceries — fruits, vegetables, milk, bread, and packages of raw chicken and beef. Maria sets the chicken aside to defrost, planning to make one of her family's favorite dinners: pasta con pollo.



Maritza says the Meals 4 Kids program encourages her to continue cooking instead of buying premade items that aren't as healthy. "My kids have become used to eating healthier, and we're incorporating fish into our diet."

This scene plays out each week for more than 400 Portland families served by Meals 4 Kids (M4K) a critical program by Meals on Wheels People (MOWP) that provides both premade meals and fresh groceries. As it celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2024, Meals 4 Kids has become a lifeline for hundreds facing food insecurity.

The program arose from a vision in 2013 by then-City Commissioner **Dan Saltzman** to expand the **Portland Children's**

Levy to address child hunger by partnering with MOWP. Dan, a long-time volunteer for MOWP, saw an opportunity to leverage the organization's infrastructure and experience to serve children and families facing food insecurity.

MOWP's efficiencies around meal delivery, supported by a strong volunteer base and generous donor support, ensure there has never been a waiting list for senior meals, making this expansion an easy lift. With voter approval, the Portland Children's Levy provided the necessary funding, and Meals 4 Kids officially launched July 1, 2014, after successfully applying for a PCL grant.

Jessica Morris, MOWP's chief people and strategy officer, has led M4K since its inception. The program serves families making less than 185% of the federal poverty level who are also often dealing with chronic illness, lack of transportation, or other barriers to food access. Over the past decade, the program has grown exponentially — M4K delivered approximately 323,000 meals last year alone — while evolving to meet changing community needs.

One key innovation was introducing a raw food option where families receive proteins, grains, produce, and other staples to prepare their own cultural meals instead of premade frozen dishes. About 75% of participating families, 80% of whom identify as Black, indigenous, or people of

color, now opt for these grocery-style deliveries.

Katie, a Meals 4 Kids participant who cares for her son with autism and epilepsy, emphasizes the program's importance in providing balanced, healthy meals and reducing her anxiety. "It's reduced my stress and allowed me to focus more on taking care of things rather than worrying about food," she says.

The support from the Portland Children's Levy has been crucial. "We could not have done what we've done over the past 10 years without them," Jessica says. Commissioner **Dan Ryan**, chair of the PCL's Allocation Committee, highlights the importance of M4K in the community: "The home delivery model is so crucial. Children who have reliable access to nutritious food do better academically, emotionally, and socially. Meals 4 Kids has played an important role in the success of hundreds of Portland children in school and in life."

As M4K celebrates its 10th anniversary, the future looks promising with a move to a new MOWP building on 82nd Avenue. This space will provide much-needed room for growth and efficiency in meal preparation and delivery, benefiting both the children's program and the traditional older adult program.

Head to mowp.org/news to read more about the Meals 4 Kids program and how you can get involved.



Bite-Sized News

WELCOMING OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS

We are thrilled to welcome three new board members to Meals on Wheels People as of May 1, 2024: **Shannon Drotning**, market president at Providence Health Plan, brings over 30 years of health insurance experience and a nine-year history of board service with Seattle's Meals

on Wheels program, Sound Generations; **Jeremy Fleischer**, second VP and actuary at The Standard, offers 25 years of actuarial expertise and a strong connection to MOWP through his employer and former board members; and **Santiago Landazuri**, vice president at Lockton Companies, contributes

over 14 years of industry experience, bilingual skills and bicultural experience, and recognition as a 40 Under 40 honoree by the *Portland Business Journal* in 2023. Their diverse backgrounds and dedication to service will greatly enhance our mission.



Shannon Drotning



Jeremy Fleischer



Santiago Landazuri

A FOND FAREWELL TO PDXPOP!

We have some bittersweet news for our popcorn fans. After five wonderful years, PDXPOP! has popped its last kernel as of May 31, 2024. While we've loved making snack time tastier, the financial outcomes have not aligned with our organizational goals. Thank you for your support and for being part of this journey with us. Here's to more adventures ahead, just with a little less popcorn!

MOWP JOINS FOOD IS MEDICINE COALITION

We are excited to announce that Meals on Wheels People is now a proud member of the Food Is Medicine Coalition! In 2021, our leadership team completed the Food Is Medicine Coalition Accelerator Program, which aims to expand access to medically tailored meals (MTM) services, and we launched our MTM program later that year. As a member agency, we are committed to furthering our mission of providing nutritious meals and enhancing the well-being of older adults and other

nutritionally at-risk populations through customized nutrition. This exciting partnership strengthens our ability to support the health of our community.



**THANK YOU FOR
ROCKING THE
WATERFRONT BLUES
FESTIVAL WITH US!**

A heartfelt thank you to all our amazing supporters who joined us at the Waterfront Blues Festival! Whether we saw you at our booth or on the Rock the Boat Blues Cares Cruise or you bought a Community Cares raffle ticket, your participation made a huge difference. Your support helps us continue providing nutritious meals and vital services to older adults in our community. We can't do it without you!



Quarterly IMPACT STATS



5,960
individuals served



366,715
meals served



6,334
Friendly Chats calls made

April 2024 - June 2024

See Her Sustain Her

Let your impact last all year long by becoming a monthly donor to Meals on Wheels People!

A monthly gift is one of the best ways to support our more than 10,000 meal recipients.

Join Sustainers Circle today.



Visit mowp.org/circle to join today!

Scan here!



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Donate a meal:
mowp.org