

MEALS **on** WHEELS[®]

WESTERN SOUTH DAKOTA

YEAR IN REVIEW



POINT OF CONNECTION

DEDICATED STAFF
SAVES LIVES

BRIDGING GENERATIONS

LOCAL KIDS LENDING A
HAND

ALL PAWS ON DECK

PAWED- EMPLOYEE OF
THE YEAR

MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA CELEBRATES 50 YEARS



In August of 2024, Meals on Wheels America celebrated 50 years of serving our Nation's seniors.

Ms. Ellie Hollander, the Chief Executive of Meals on Wheels America, made this statement celebrating the national organization's bicentennial,



“

In 1974, the first national meeting of senior nutrition programs took place in D.C., and from that gathering, Meals on Wheels America was born. This past year marked our 50th anniversary of bringing leaders together to solve senior hunger and isolation across the country—and our national conference is doing just that, uniting us in our mission.

Our vision is clear: an America where all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity. And our mission remains steadfast: empowering local community programs to improve the health and quality of life for the seniors they serve.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Here's to the next 50 years of making a difference together!

”

BRIDGING GENERATIONS

GIRL SCOUTS - DAKOTA HORIZONS

These amazing young ladies donated 2 pallets of their famous cookies AND over 100lbs of pet food for their seniors! Now that's what I call a *sweet* gesture!



DELIVERING UNDER A DECADE

Corbin Lermak displays a generous heart by delivering meals with his grandparents. Corbin loves proving that age is just a number when it comes to supporting his community!



YOUNG PHILANTHROPIST

This young man generously donated \$7 from his summer lemonade stand to help his neighbors! Everyone can make a difference- no matter how small!



HIGH SCHOOL HELPERS

Students and staff from the St. Thomas Moore high school came to the Rapid City Kitchen and Minneluzahan Senior Center to help serve up meals!

MISS SOUTH DAKOTA DELIVERS SMILES



☐☐ Glad I could
bring a smile
and some
flowers to
each person I
met! ☐☐

A neighborhood of seniors were delighted to have their meals delivered by the generous and talented Miss South Dakota 2024, Joelle Simpson!

We are always looking for generous hearts like Joelle to volunteer as delivery drivers Monday - Friday mornings! For only a couple hours out of your day you can make connections and help local seniors in need! Let us know what days work for you!

To join the dedicated folks volunteering in your community, please contact Tim at (605) 381-2129

RURAL REFRESH

In February of 2024, we bid farewell to Denise Miller after many years of service as she retired to spend time with family. Taking the reins, Luella Goodall has settled in as the lead of the Country Meals program.

With its humble beginning in 2018, the Country Meals program offers nutritious meals and social visits to rural seniors outside of city limits. This expands services to the communities of Box Elder, Buffalo Gap, Piedmont, Black Hawk, Summerset, New Underwood, Keystone, Hill City, Fairburn, and Nemo by delivering 6 to 16 hot and frozen meals on a weekly basis.



“IT MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE THAT THE GUYS GET TO SEE THESE PEOPLE FACE TO FACE BECAUSE SOMETIMES THEY DON’T SEE ANYBODY. THEY LOOK FORWARD TO THAT ONE DAY A WEEK WHEN THEY SEE SOMEONE AND IT’S GOOD FOR THEM TOO.”



Taking the lead on a program that now serves 100+ seniors was a challenge but Lou has a strong passion for the seniors she serves, “It helps them, it helps the community, and it makes you feel good inside knowing that you’re doing something that makes a difference.”

Her goal for the future of the program is to continue growing and expand the team so she can build stronger connections with those she serves.

POINT OF CONNECTION

Meals is the name, but truly, connection is the game. I had the pleasure to sit down with the wonderful lady behind establishing meaningful relationships with Rapid City seniors, Ms. Noreen Hanzel.

Noreen has been with the program for over 25 years and her role is crucial to the mission and to the seniors. As RC Home Delivery Coordinator, Noreen works with the seniors one-on-one, visiting each senior in their home, establishing connection with family (if any), and gaining a deeper understanding of the seniors' situations through visits and phone calls.

"I've had several family members express their gratitude to me when I call people who didn't answer when we came to deliver. So many times, someone is in need of help and because we check on folks everyday, the families know their loved ones are okay."

NOREEN

The extra connection is not only appreciated by friends and family,

"We have a couple of ladies who call every day to see what's on the menu. They have menus but are lonely so they use the excuse to call. We enjoy being able to visit with folks who need just a little extra time and love."

This connection is truly essential to the seniors. More often than one may expect, it can be the difference between life and death.

"Tim [RC Volunteer Coordinator] and I did a wellness check on a fragile lady who didn't answer the door for lunch. We found her in the bedroom on the floor, she had been there for a few days. We called 911 and an ambulance took her to the hospital. While we were waiting for the ambulance to leave, I talked to the neighbor and he volunteered to watch over her beloved cat. Had it not been for MOW, she and her cat could have perished."



Early Program Brochure

It is a difficult situation to navigate and requires a complicated and special blend of compassion, professionalism, and heart that Noreen is known for.

Not only does she have endless warmth for the seniors she connects with, but their furry family as well.

“Pets are so important in our lives.”



Last spring, a long time participant, Pia, was urgently transferred to the hospital, leaving her handsome and stoic male cat, endearingly named Ms. Kitty, behind.

“Everyday I went over to Pia’s house and fed her cat, played with him, and made sure he had water.

When we found out Pia was going to a nursing home, I talked with Pia and asked if I could take Cinco [renamed after his gender reveal at the vet] home with me as we had grown quite fond of each other in the weeks I took care of him. She agreed to that, we didn't want him to get forgotten or passed over. He had already lost his Mom.

He's very happy and enjoying his new home.”



CINCO  ~~**MS. KITTY**~~



“The best thing I love about my job is I get to help so many people in so many different ways. Not only nutritionally, but mentally and sometimes physically, and its very rewarding... makes you feel good at the end of the day.

Thank you Noreen for your ongoing and seemingly endless dedication and service to the seniors you serve.

ALL PAWS ON DECK

If you have the pleasure of visiting West Park apartments in Rapid City, you'll see the dynamic duo, Tom the human and Bob the black lab.

Bob, Meals on Wheels pawed-employee of the year, and his human, Tom, share a close bond that brings a smile to all who meet them.

Tom's history with the program started in 2021 **"We Started volunteering, my wife and I, October of 2021. We were just doing deliveries in our car, hanging out, taking the dogs with us. It was just fun meeting all the people."**

As for his sidekick, **"We adopted him from the shelter I think late summer of 2018... Anywhere I go, he goes."** After a few years of volunteering with Meals, Tom and Bob were asked to officially join the staff at West Park Apartments. Since joining the community, Bob has become quite famous in the building bringing a joyful atmosphere to the congregate dining area.

"We make a lot of jokes about how much more popular he is than we are... He goes somewhere and they all say "Hi Bob!"

I thought about having shirts printed out that say **"emotional support human."**

Tom describes his time with the Meals on Wheels Program for anyone thinking about lending a hand, **" I can almost guarantee that you're gonna have fun. Whether it's the people you are working directly with or even for, to the people that you're helping and serving, this is just a great environment."**



BAKING UP CHANGE

LEMMON GETS A FRESH START AT THE RED BARN BAKERY.

In early September, the Lemmon Meals Program served their first meals out of the Red Barn cafe.

The new location allows for seniors to dine alongside their family, friends, and neighbors in a familiar and welcoming environment.

“This is a positive new chapter for the program and I hope the seniors of Lemmon enjoy the change.” says George Larson.



'LOAVES' OF LOVE THE SOUR: A BAKERY

The Sour, a beloved local Rapid City bakery has gone above and beyond to bring the community the warmth of their fresh baked goods. Starting in October of 2024, The Sour has been donating batches of their surplus loaves and other baked confections to be enjoyed by the senior Meals participants of Rapid City.

Cara Bree, Director of Kitchen Operations for the program says, “Their help has just been amazing. It’s helping offset our growing food costs and the variety and quality of goods have been a major highlight for the seniors... It’s really heartwarming.”



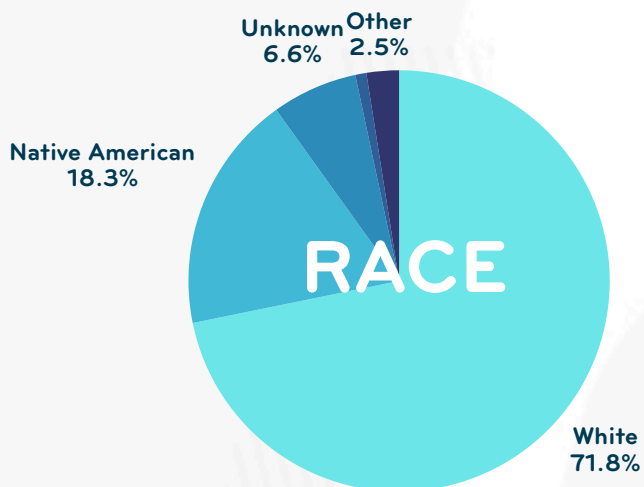
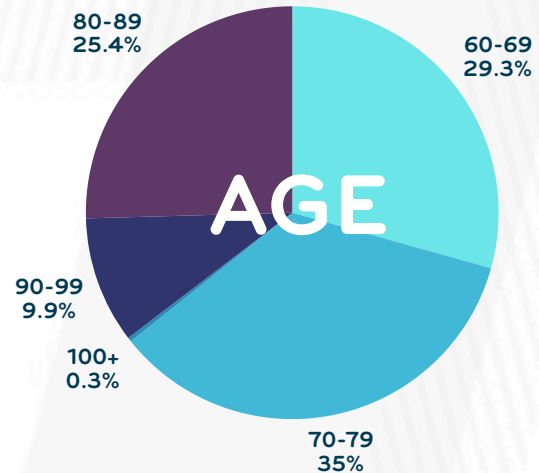
YOUR IMPACT



3,401

WESTERN SD SENIORS
SERVED IN 2024

ON A DAILY BASIS,
MEALS ON WHEELS
WESTERN SD
SERVES NEARLY
AS MANY PEOPLE
AS THE AVERAGE
U.S. MCDONALDS
RESTAURANT



1 IN 5 SENIORS SERVED
ARE VETERANS

436,919

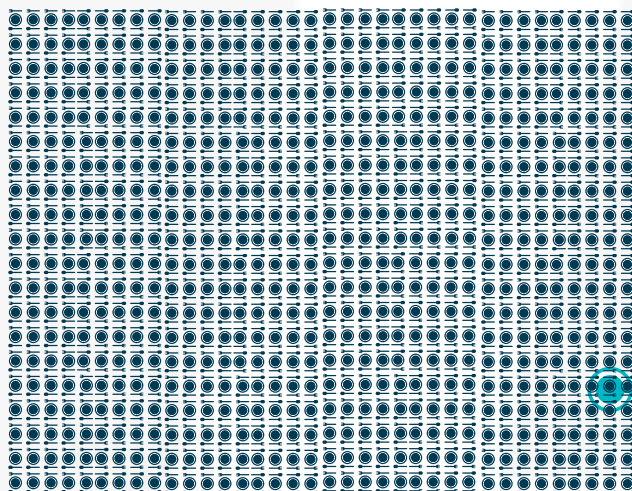
MEALS SERVED IN 2024

3.5 MIL
OZ

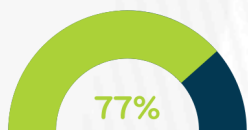
OF FRUITS + VEGETABLES

1.7 MIL
OZ

OF LEAN PROTIEN

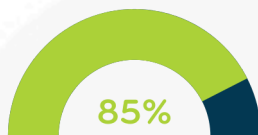


OF HOME DELIVERED MEAL PARTICIPANTS:



77%

say the meals help
IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH



85%

say the services help them
FEEL MORE SECURE



92%

say the meals help them
LIVE INDEPENDENTLY

BLIZZARD BAGS: 2025

Meals on Wheels Western SD serves folks struggling to afford a meal, cook independently, and fighting decline due to the isolation of later life. These same neighbors are the ones most threatened by the dangers of an extreme weather event like a blizzard. That is why every year, communities and businesses across the region come together to prepare and provide seniors with the necessary nutrition to stay healthy if a winter storm were to restrict access to their home.

The 'Blizzard Bag' is a staple for all Meals on Wheels participants, acting as a fail-safe in the event of a blizzard or other emergency that bars delivery. Filled with shelf stable, nutritious foods, water, safety materials, and local resources, this bag is a lifeline for hundreds of stranded seniors.



IN FALL OF 2024, OVER 2,000 OF THESE BAGS WERE ASSEMBLED AND DISTRIBUTED TO MEALS PARTICIPANTS IN EVERY COMMUNITY - BUT THIS WAS NO EASY FEAT.

Businesses, families, and volunteers across the region played a crucial role from funding to assembly to distribution. A heartfelt 'Thank You' to all who aided in this project!

As we start the new year, Meals on Wheels Western SD is looking for community sponsors to help provide these life-saving Blizzard Bags to our senior neighbors in 2025.

PLEASE REACH OUT TO JONAH AT JONAH.BAIER@MEALSPROGRAM.COM FOR SPONSORSHIP INFORMATION. CUSTOM INCENTIVE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE!

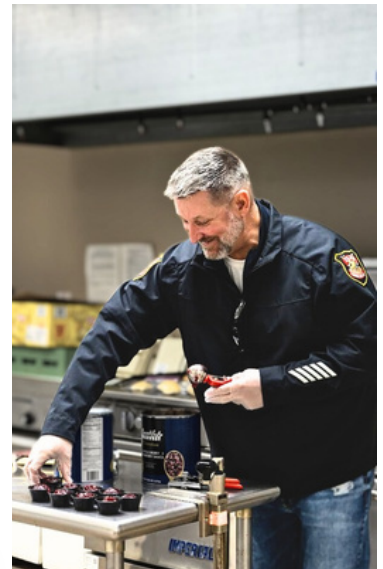
THANK YOU 2024 SPONSORS



THANKSGIVING AT MINNELUZAHAN



Minneluzahan Senior Center was proud to host over a dozen of Rapid City's finest with both fire and police departments dishing and serving this years Thanksgiving meal!



HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

The most wonderful time of year! Thank you to everyone who helped make this holiday season special!



STURGIS



OVER 4 DOZEN HEATED BLANKETS FOR THE MOST RURAL & ISOLATED SENIORS COURTESY OF PRECISION MECHANICAL



LEAD



200 POINTSETTIAS COURTESY OF FLORA GRACE



RAPID CITY

ELDER ANGEL TREE

You may have heard about it, you may have even helped to make it special; the Elder Angel Tree continues to be a beautiful centerpiece of the seniors' holiday season.

Starting in 2019, Black Hills Advocate partnered with Meals on Wheels Western SD to bring Christmas joy to our local seniors. In 2023, Sequel Inc. joined the Elder Angel Tree team and this season, they took the reigns.

As a newer local nonprofit organization, Sequel Inc. specializes in providing support to seniors with dementia including their caregivers. They also provide Elder Angel Funds to seniors in need - making them a perfect leader for this project.

This holiday season proved to be an extraordinary year of community collaboration and celebration as over 600 personal gift bags went out to area seniors!

Each gift bag included an array of goods including 'warm fuzzies' like blankets, hats, scarves, and mittens, games and activity books, essential toiletries, festive snacks, beverages, and sweet treats to be enjoyed by our homebound neighbors.

As special as the gifts and goodies may be, the true beauty of this tradition lies in the generosity and collaboration as the project is entirely supplied and funded by the generosity of the community.

The red ornaments on the tree highlight our keystone partners with this year's Elder Angel Tree.

A special and heartfelt 'Thank You' to Sequel and all of our partners this season as well as our supporters in the community who are working tirelessly to ensure that no senior goes hungry!



NOVEL IDEA FOR DEMENTIA

A picture can say a thousand words, especially for those struggling with dementia.

Librarian Kathlynn Short has brought the magic of storytelling to adults of all ages and abilities by establishing a new collection of No-Text Picture books at the Rapid City Public Library.

Unlike a typical novel with a storyline, Short explains, these books contain high-quality images that readers can easily recognize, taking away the struggle of trying to remember what was written on the previous page.



“These books just require appreciating an image of a mountain or a pig or a squirrel or sewing supplies.... They allow the person flipping through it to come up with their own story rather than reading along.”

Creating the largest no-text book collections in the State, Short shared her inspiration, “The Rawlins Municipal library in Pierre actually has a small collection and when I saw it, I immediately knew that there are people in Rapid City and the surrounding areas that could benefit.”

Countless community resources and activities like the Memory Cafe, Lunch and Learn, and seed swaps are available across West River public libraries. As part of the Black Hills Library Consortium, many of these libraries share books and resources with each other through a reciprocal borrowing program. They can even offer a delivery service to bring these no-text books right to a homebound senior’s door.

Short encourages everyone to reach out and learn what their local library has to offer - and of course, carry a (free!) library card.



DIRECTOR'S YEAR IN REVIEW

A statement from George Larson II, Meals on Wheels
Western South Dakota Executive Director



2024 was a year dominated by increasing need and increasing costs.

Seniors across West River reached out with concerns about rising rent, rising food costs and asking if Meals on Wheels Western South Dakota could help.

Throughout 2024 we met with influential community members, businesses, and officials to find the best way we could partner to ensure that seniors could continue to live independently in the place they call home.

Many communities rose to the challenge and committed themselves to making sure that the seniors that relied on them could remain in their homes.

In September of 2024, to offset rising costs, Meals on Wheels reduced staff, changed the delivery model from daily deliveries to 5-7 meals delivered once-a-week in five of the 64 communities we serve, and strengthened partnerships to reduce food costs.

December of 2024 brought new hope and renewed commitments from the communities that Meals on Wheels serves. Cities, counties, companies and individuals stepped up and made their voices heard that providing for their senior neighbors was vital.

The beginning of **the New Year** has brought into focus the importance of Meals on Wheels Western South Dakota's mission of delivering value and saving lives and taxpayer dollars.

In fact, **every dollar that is spent on Meals on Wheels saves at least nine dollars to the community.** On average, for the cost of just one day in the hospital you can provide a year of Meals on Wheels services. The nutrition and support keeps seniors healthier and reduces the number of days in hospitals when something does happen. In addition, the companionship and nutritional services allow those that otherwise might not be able to leave the hospital without the support necessary, to return home.

Meals on Wheels provides the opportunity to not only ensure that a local senior is receiving meals, but to actually deliver those meals to their home and create that bond of caring and compassion. Few other opportunities exist that allow the community to make that personal connection and to see firsthand the impact they're making.

Unfortunately, this impact has not been fully grasped by all. In 2025, our State and Federal officials are warning us that "there will not be enough federal dollars to take care of everyone that needs you. Difficult decisions will need to be made."

Our trusted partners at the state and federal levels have encouraged us to focus further on sustainable funding from local communities.

We are looking for individuals, organizations and foundations to help ensure that seniors in western South Dakota's communities will be fed, nurtured and watched out for for generations to come.

I envision South Dakota as a place where no senior is hungry, no senior is left alone, and no senior has no one to turn to for help.

Will you help ensure that vision comes true? Will you be part of the solution of senior hunger and isolation?

Join me and TOGETHER, WE CAN DELIVER!



George Larson II
Executive Director



ATTENTION NEIGHBORS!

Mark Your Calendars!

March for Meals is a national celebration when the Older Americans Act was amended in March of 1972, making senior nutrition programs (like this one) possible!

This year, Meals on Wheels Western SD will be celebrating this event by hosting **Community Champions Week**, **March 17th - 21st**, honoring our partners and community champions that make the mission possible!



Festivities will be held at the Rapid City Meals on Wheels Kitchen (330 Philadelphia St. Rapid City, SD 57702) from 10:30am to 12:00pm all week long!

Anyone interested in an opportunity to get hands-on with the Meals process and meet the star staff, volunteers, and of course the seniors, are encouraged to reach out!



Local champions such as Courtesy Subaru, First Interstate Bank, Rapid City First Responders, and star volunteers will be in attendance to assist in delivering meals to the area seniors.

If you or your business is interested in participating, please text or call Tim at:
(605) 381-2129

OR email Jonah at:
jonah.baier@mealsprogram.com
to learn more!

SCAN TO LEARN HOW
YOU CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE IN YOUR
COMMUNITY



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