



MEALS ON WHEELS
DIABLO REGION

1300 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

EMPLOYER MATCHING MAKES YOUR GIFT GO FURTHER



It's open enrollment season in many companies so it's time to see if your employer has a matching gifts program. When you donate to a charity, companies with matching gifts programs will double and sometimes even triple your gift, making your support go even further!

Follow these simple steps to increase your impact:

- Ask your HR or Benefits Department if your employer has a matching gifts program.
- If they do, fill out the easy paperwork.
- If MOW Diablo Region isn't on their list of charities, ask if we can be added. (Most employers allow you to pick your charity of choice.)
- Then make your gift and follow your employer's instructions to allow MOW Diablo Region to receive the match.

It's the easiest way to give more to help vulnerable seniors receive meals and supportive services from Meals on Wheels Diablo Region! If you need any additional paperwork from us, please contact **Shanti Peterson, speterson@mowdr.org, 925.937.8315.**



A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Being resilient means you have the capacity to recover quickly from challenges. Since March 2020, everyone has been tested and we have all had to demonstrate our resilience. Our senior neighbors know about being tested. They have lived through personal struggles and loss, wars, inflation, and some, even the Depression. The pandemic has disproportionately impacted this vulnerable population, and now the increased cost of food, prescriptions, and other essentials weigh heavy on those living on a fixed income. More elders are reaching out to Meals on Wheels Diablo Region to remain nourished, feel less isolated, and remain safe living independently. We have delivered more than a meal in spite of these obstacles.

In this edition of Special Delivery, you'll meet a Friendly Visitor volunteer who worked through her grief to continue to give back. You'll see how our Cafés adapted during Covid-19, are now ramping up, and even beginning to offer a new dining model. You'll also meet a client who benefited from a new program developed during the pandemic to meet the needs of very food insecure seniors and how it continues to deliver and thrive.

We have all been tested during this difficult time, but MOW Diablo Region remains resilient, thanks to the incredible older adults we serve, the volunteers who give their time and compassion, and our generous donors who have helped us along the way. We hope you enjoy these stories that demonstrate the strength that shows we are all stronger together.

Caitlin Sly
Executive Director

HOLDING ON TO HIS INDEPENDENCE

When Mark P. was born, no one thought he would live. His parents couldn't afford an ambulance to take him to the incubator at the county hospital in Martinez. A nurse wrapped him in a blanket and ran to the hospital in the cold. Since eye-coverings weren't used for babies in incubators in 1952, he lived but was blind.

But blindness didn't hold Mark back. He worked for Contra Costa County for 25 years helping other visually impaired people get services. Even with his accomplishments some things were still a challenge for Mark, including cooking.

He depended on others to take him to the store for frozen meals, but during Covid-19, it became more difficult for him to get food. His sister suggested he contact Meals on Wheels Diablo Region and Mark began receiving home delivered meals and Breakfast Bags.

When the pandemic hit, MOW Diablo Region recognized that one meal wasn't enough for very food insecure seniors. Many were dividing the meal to have enough food for lunch, dinner, and to take at night with medications. To respond to this concern, MOW Diablo Region began delivering Breakfast Bags with cereal, yogurt, hardboiled eggs, string cheese,

fruit, and even salads and sandwiches. "We noticed a difference in our seniors who were getting the Breakfast Bags," say Caitlin Sly, Executive Director of MOW Diablo Region. "They reported feeling healthier, not experiencing hunger, and not feeling anxious about having enough food."

The Breakfast Bag was also helpful for clients like Mark, who had difficulty getting to the supermarket and couldn't cook for himself. Additionally, he likes all the food and feels that he is eating healthier. Because he lives alone, Mark also looks forward to the interaction he has with the volunteer.

"The food is delicious, and the volunteers are super. They tell me what is in the bag, so I don't put the salad in the microwave," jokes Mark. "It's a great service that allows me to be independent."



THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

Over 15 years ago, Elinor, a golf instructor who was a special advocate for foster children, decided to spend some of her free time delivering meals to seniors with Meals on Wheels Diablo Region. "I never looked at it as a chore, I looked at it as doing something nice for someone," says Elinor. After falling in love with the work and the mission, she expanded her reach by becoming a Friendly Visitor.

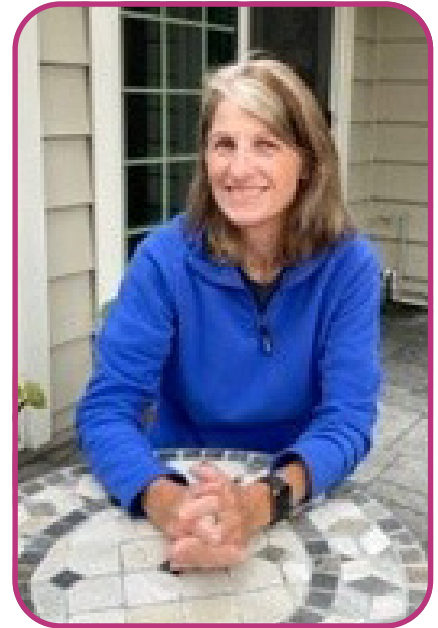
In recent years, she was matched with Bernadette, whose cancer diagnosis made getting out more difficult. With no family besides her nephew in the area, Bernadette was mostly alone and sought Elinor's support. "She told me, 'You know, I could die here, and no one would ever know it,'" says Elinor. "I promised I'd call her every day to make sure she was okay." Bernadette always expressed gratitude to Elinor for her time, conversation, laughter, and friendship.

Bernadette reminded Elinor of her mom who had passed away. She views their relationship as a two-way street; Bernadette helped her, and she helped Bernadette. They went shopping and ran errands together, and they even had their own little coffee shop in Alamo that they would visit together regularly. "She always had something

fun to say! When my mother passed away, conversations with Bernadette were almost like therapy."

When they spoke together and Elinor asked questions about the past, Bernadette would light up because nobody else asked about life in her earlier years. After Bernadette passed, Elinor took a little time off from volunteering, but is now excited to re-join MOW Diablo Region's Friendly Visitors program and begin new meaningful connections.

"I like helping people," says Elinor. "Everyone should volunteer. There are people out there who need a friend or just someone to talk to. If you can make somebody smile, why not? What have you got to lose?"



MORE DAYS, MORE SMILES AT THE CAFÉ

On that fateful day in March 2020 when shelter-in-place orders went into effect and our Cafés closed, the primary concern of Meals on Wheels Diablo Region was how to ensure no one missed a meal. Our nutrition staff quickly came up with a solution — arrange for Café clients to pick up meals at Café sites, and those who didn't feel comfortable leaving their homes would start receiving home delivered meals. The problem of getting these older adults' meals was solved, but the socializing that so many Café clients enjoy couldn't be replicated.

In July 2021, over a year after closing, the Cafés slowly began to open once or twice a week in a few cities. "It was an exciting time," says Bonnie Paulson, Café Program Specialist. "Our seniors were so happy to be back and to see each other again. The isolation was difficult for so

many. We heard from Café clients that the socialization from attending the Cafés is as important as the meal."

Café hours continue to expand and in most locations are now operating three to four days a week. Also, MOW Diablo Region opened a new Café in Brentwood serving brunch twice a week at Chapala Mexican Restaurant. "We recognize that younger seniors may not want to go to a senior center for lunch, but feel more comfortable in a restaurant atmosphere," explains Caitlin Sly, Executive Director. "We also want to provide food that would appeal to more culturally diverse tastes. We feel this restaurant concept really meets those requirements."

To learn more about Café hours in your community and to reserve a spot, call 925-395-4218, or go to mowdiablregion.org/cafes.



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Thank you

to Safeway for being an Emerald Sponsor of our 2022 Dining to Deliver Gala. Through its Nourishing Neighbors initiative, they have helped us keep so many vulnerable seniors nourished and safe at home.