

No such thing as a free lunch

Myths abound, even around the Senior Center. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about my favorite meal — lunch — and how we make it happen, and what we, as a community, can do to strengthen this program for ages to come.

Typically I'm writing these columns to welcome everyone to come eat at the Senior Center and the invitation remains, but there seems to be some false notions about how our program works. So right now I think an explanation is in order. My main goal is to keep it simple ... wish me luck.

Recently the American Dietetic Association published a position paper on food and nutrition programs for community-residing older adults, in which they repeatedly stressed the importance of strong community-based nutrition programs for older adults.

Among the benefits are health promotion, risk reduction, and disease management, not to mention the colder facts regarding health care costs and the startling comparison that for the price of one month in a nursing home you could feed someone a home delivered meal FIVE DAYS/WEEK FOR SEVEN YEARS! (JAM Diet Assoc. 2010; 110: pg. 463-472).

So now let's look at the local picture and the cost side of our Meals Program.

I think the old saying goes, "There's no such thing as a free lunch," right?

And yet there are a few false assumptions about how the Senior Center meals are financed.

Let's imagine a fresh baked pie.

Let's have the pie represent the whole amount of what it costs to produce a meal at the Senior Center, including groceries, labor, kitchen space and utilities plus the administration. Let's say the true cost is \$6 per meal — that's what it costs the Senior Center to provide the meal. How does the Senior Center recover those costs you wonder?

Only 50 percent of the costs are covered by the meal reimbursement rate from the state and that's only if we have the proper paperwork (a current registration for those over 60).

We attempt to fund the other portion of the costs with program revenue (the suggested donation of \$4 for those 60 and older or \$5.50 for those under 60). We also are extremely grateful for donations made by local foundations,



**Center
Stage**

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businesses and individuals to help the program make ends meet.

Since this past October, we have experienced a heightened level of state reporting requirements and the necessity of meal participants having current registration forms in our data system

to enable us to count their meals for reimbursement.

We are very thankful to everyone who has helped us with this process. We also apologize to anyone frustrated by our evolving systems in complying with these new requirements. We will continue to do our best to strengthen the meals program from inside the Senior Center and our thanks to everyone for their support.

So you're wondering what you can do to support the Meals Program?

If you are 60 or over, we invite you to help support the Senior Center. We will receive more of our grant funding this year if we have more registered meal participants eating more frequently between now and October 1st, 2010.

Please come for lunch and plan to

take the time (or make an appointment) to complete the registration paperwork.

It just takes a few minutes but it helps strengthen the program for years to come. If you already frequent the Senior Center or one of our satellite sites and wonder about your registration status, you can inquire at the front desk or call 672-2240 and ask.

The bottom line is that the Meals Program nourishes the lives of hundreds of Sheridan's wonderful older community members. We all, regardless of age, need this program to remain strong for generations to come.

Good nutrition is a primary key to good health and the ability to age strong. Please do what you can to strengthen our program from the outside while we work from the inside ... and if you ever wonder what all this commotion is about, please join us for a meal...pull up a chair and take in some nourishment — and I'm not just talking food — come enjoy one of the most beautiful community centers in Sheridan.

Carolyn Benepe is Community Nutrition Director at the Sheridan Senior Center.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.