

Volunteering for Home Delivered Meals a chance to give back

This message comes at this important time of year to remind Sheridan residents that there are alternatives for our senior population to meet their nutritional needs year-round.

As many of us are aware, individuals who are elderly and individuals who suffer from severe disabilities are often unable to provide for themselves independently and must depend upon third parties to provide transportation, home health care, and housekeeping services.

Many times, this dependence also relates to the inability to safely cook meals that offer proper nutrition.

This dependence for services has increased dramatically over the past several years, as our elderly population has steadily increased, while the younger adult population decreases as young adults leave small towns for larger communities looking for careers.

This volatile economy has also contributed to a marked decrease in donations received for private and public service providers. Volunteer and public and private social care agencies are called upon to breach this ever-increasing gap between funding and quality of care for the elderly and disabled.

There is a national program, Meals on Wheels Association of America

(www.mowaa.org), which offers support and help to local efforts in providing meals to those in need. In March of 2008, MOWAA sponsored a study titled "The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in America."

The purpose of this study was to raise awareness of senior programs and solicit financial support. The study found that over 5 million (11.4 percent of all seniors) nationwide were at risk from malnourishment and hunger.

Those individuals most at risk were found to be seniors with limited incomes; seniors under age 70; those who were parenting a grandchild; African-Americans and Hispanics; unmarried individuals; renters; and those living in the South.

Over two-thirds of the seniors at risk are white, which contradicts other reports that indicate minority status and poverty in the general population as most at risk.

This study also predicts that by 2025, over 75 percent of seniors will be affected by food insecurity and 30 percent by



**Center
Stage**

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Villa



hunger.

Within Sheridan's community of volunteer services is a well run and staffed program called Home Delivered Meals. Sheridan's Home Delivered Meals is one of the many programs through the Sheridan

Senior Center and has made a substantially positive impact in eliminating the danger of hunger and poor nutrition in our senior and disabled population.

Volunteers from all over the community, including Volunteers of America, Hammer's Chevrolet, and First Interstate Bank, continue to make this service available to all who need it. Unlike some communities, we are not short of volunteers to deliver to those in need — yet.

But keeping in mind that our senior population is growing larger by the year, more volunteers will be needed. Older volunteers retire or become unable to continue their efforts; some move to other communities.

Volunteering for Home Delivered

Meals can take as little as one hour a month, or one hour a week, and provides numerous rewards as you gain acquaintance with various seniors. You may spend a few minutes visiting and listening to the recipient's stories of the past.

Engaging in social activities such as talking, telling stories, and exchanging news helps prevent a senior from lapsing into severe Alzheimer's, as it exercises the brain's memory and enhances social interaction. Volunteering for Home Delivered Meals offers unlimited opportunities for giving back to our community.

I encourage you to give an hour a month to this community service. You may contact the Sheridan Senior Citizens Center at 672-2240 and ask for the Home Delivered Meals Coordinator.

Here's hoping you will receive the blessing of the Christmas season and a bright and prosperous new year.

Tamara Villa, loan processor for First Interstate Bank at Sugarland, has lived in Sheridan for two years and enjoys working with the senior population.

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.