Priorities and Plans for 2015

Thoughts from Tara A. Ellis, President and CEO

We anticipate another busy year in 2015 – one full of milestones and important changes that enable us to continue fulfilling our mission. While it wouldn’t be possible to share all of our plans and priorities with you in this space, I want to tell you about a few that we are particularly excited about for this year.

Key milestones, changes and priorities include:

• This spring we will complete installation of a 450-kw generator system, which has been in the works for three years. Late last year, we secured the last of the $250,000 we needed to begin work on the system. At this point, generators are ordered, external natural gas piping is installed and a concrete pad has been poured. The generators should be delivered, installed and tested during our first quarter with a ribbon cutting to follow. This generator system is crucial in making sure we can be fully operational in the event of an emergency.

• Our client software system helps us manage daily operations – such as client files, emergency contact information, our routing software for meal delivery and daily meal counts by diet type for accurate meal production. Our current client system is more than fifteen years old and is unstable. After more than two years of research and fundraising, we will complete the roll out of a new client system in our first quarter. The system will be state-of-the-art, automatically updated by the providing vendor, and will provide us with enhanced functionality such as running custom reports and storing more than one emergency contact, just to mention a few. We are so excited about this system, which will enable us to remain strong and efficient as we grow!

• We currently offer five diets: Regular (low fat, low cholesterol, low sodium), Diabetic/Calorie Controlled, Renal, Ground, and Bland. Later this year we will begin a pilot for two new diets that we have begun to see more requests for – a diet made without gluten and a vegetarian diet. This pilot is possible due to a donation from the Meals on Wheels Association of America. If the pilot shows a community need for these diets, we intend to make those options permanent.

• Because we have a significant annual funding gap, it is very important for us to find ways to diversify revenue. Within the last two years we have begun looking for opportunities to provide meals to other groups and organizations – whether that be other not-for-profits, nursing homes, day cares, adult day cares, camps, schools or even smaller Meals on Wheels programs that can’t afford to produce in-house meals. We will aggressively continue with these efforts in 2015, and will build further in-house capacity so that we also can offer organizations bulk products like soups and sauces and pre-packaged sandwiches in addition to our regular meal service and event catering. Please send us your leads for new business.

I appreciate your support of the work that we do at Meals on Wheels more than I can possibly convey. Ours is truly a community mission and we would not be able to serve the homebound seniors and disabled individuals throughout WNY without your help.

Thank you!

Tara A. Ellis
A “Snowvember” to Remember!

It can be hard for those who didn’t experience it directly to imagine the intensity and volume of snow we received during the November 17 – 20, 2014 storm – commonly known as “Snowvember.”

For Meals on Wheels for WNY the storm was crippling in a way that we hadn’t previously experienced. Our commissary is in South Buffalo, which was under seven feet of snow and a strict driving ban, and almost half of our 25 home-delivery sites and the clients they serve also were in the heavily affected areas. We could not have made it through the storm with zero client fatalities or injuries without a significant amount of pre-planning and strong community partnerships! Thank you!

It all starts with pre-planning...

Each fall, Meals on Wheels sends materials out to every client reminding them to have stores of water, canned goods and other items they may need in the event of an emergency. Also, when a client comes on service, a Meals on Wheels Social Worker assesses his or her support network. For those with no or very limited local support, we sign them up for “blizzard boxes.” At the beginning of each winter season, we give these high-risk clients a box of bottled water, powdered milk, tuna, peanut butter, crackers and other non-perishable items to be used in the event that Meals on Wheels is not able to deliver. We also store extra blizzard boxes at our community sites and at local police and fire stations. In the event of a closure, every client with a blizzard box is called to make sure they are okay; a new box is deployed if necessary.

Feeding a Snowed-In Community

During Snowvember, Meals on Wheels was closed three days in a row. By Thursday, November 20, all 1,800 home delivery clients had received a call from one of our Registered Dietitians or Social Workers to ensure they had enough food for immediate use and to see if they needed additional food to make it through the weekend.

On Friday and Saturday, November 21 and 22, team members who were able to reach the commissary prepared and helped deliver flash frozen meals and blizzard boxes to high-risk clients, those who were low on supplies and even non-MOW participants who called Erie County to request assistance. We had help from numerous community organizations in getting the meals out, including the Erie County Executive’s Office, City of Buffalo Mayor’s Office, the Mayor’s Citizen Preparedness Team, Erie County Sheriff’s Department, Buffalo Police Department’s SWAT team, the National Guard, the Community Action Organization and our food vendor, Bateman Senior Meals. Meals were delivered by van, four-wheel drive vehicle and by snowmobile.

After the storm...

We are thrilled that all of our clients were able to make it through the storm safely and cannot say enough in appreciation of the wonderful support network that truly makes Buffalo (and the WNY community) the city of good neighbors. Unfortunately the storm continues to affect us – this one storm alone created a $30,000 hole in our budget – partially because of a crushed loading dock and the expense of re-stocking emergency supplies. The weather this past year has been brutal – with MOW being closed an unprecedented seven times, further deepening the financial losses. Please help us restock and ensure we are prepared for the next big storm by making a donation in the enclosed envelope. We can’t continue to serve the community without your help.

We hope this answers your questions about how we prepare for and manage storms. Your support of our work is greatly appreciated! Thank you for helping Meals on Wheels serve the most vulnerable members of our community!

Buffalo Common Council Recognizes Meals on Wheels

In January, Meals on Wheels for WNY received a certificate of recognition from the City of Buffalo Common Council. The certificate recognizes MOW-WNY President and CEO Tara A. Ellis, as well as the committed volunteers of the agency.

It reads: “On behalf of The City of Buffalo Common Council, we pay tribute to your extraordinary efforts to enrich the lives of many of our citizens by promoting independent healthy living, while offering nutrition food and a friendly visit. We sincerely appreciate your commitment to our great city.”

Meals on Wheels for WNY delivers nearly 900,000 meals each year to approximately 3,600 homebound seniors and disabled individuals. Approximately half of those clients and meals are in the City of Buffalo. Meals on Wheels also delivers more than 250,000 meals each year to mobile seniors who are healthy enough to reach a congregate site.

Pictured here are Council Members Richard A. Fontana and David A. Franczyk, presenting the award to Tara A. Ellis.
Many visitors and callers to Meals on Wheels for WNY have the chance to talk with one of our warm and welcoming volunteers. Gail O’Meara is one of our reception volunteers and she takes not one but three four-hour shifts each week!

A retired expert in travel and customer service, working the reception desk at Meals on Wheels is a perfect fit for O’Meara because she loves meeting and speaking with all of the visitors who come to or call our facility.

“It’s heartwarming to speak with people and realize that I’m improving their day, and it’s interesting to hear their stories and thoughts. It really delights me,” O’Meara said.

A number of years ago, O’Meara had been transferred to Florida for work. Her father, then in his 80s, wasn’t able to cook for himself and lost weight – eventually dropping from 180 pounds to just 95. O’Meara signed him up for Meals on Wheels and it was MOW that enabled him to remain at home the rest of his life.

“It was a blessing when my father received your meals,” O’Meara said. “They kept him healthy and helped him put nearly 50 pounds back on. And it was so nice to be able to contact Meals on Wheels and make sure that he was okay and that someone was visiting with him.”

O’Meara wanted to help Meals on Wheels when she retired but worried that she wouldn’t be able to deliver meals because of issues with her knees. She says that she loves working the front desk – greeting visitors and answering and directing calls. She would recommend it to anyone.

“Everyone should volunteer with Meals on Wheels. Food is the basic necessity of life and there are a lot of people out there who have a difficult time getting meals,” O’Meara said. “Meals on Wheels is a wonderful resource.”

O’Meara also assists with volunteer recruitment through the Meals on Wheels Volunteer Committee.

“We’re very fortunate to have Gail and our other office volunteers,” Tara A. Ellis, President and CEO, said. “The reception desk is crucial in making sure that people have a good first impression of Meals on Wheels and Gail greets every single caller and visitor with a warm, welcoming smile.”

We need you! More volunteers are needed to assist with the reception desk. Currently available shifts are Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. and Friday from 12 p.m.- 4 p.m. Call Rachel or Melanie at 716-822-2002 for more information.

Protect Yourself from Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless and potentially dangerous gas produced when fuel (heating oil, propane, kerosene, charcoal, gasoline, wood or natural gas) is burned without enough air for complete combustion. If inhaled in large quantities for a prolonged time period, carbon monoxide can cause unconsciousness, brain damage and even death. If you, or anyone in your household, experience the following symptoms, immediately open windows and doors to ventilate your home, then move outside and call 911 or the fire department:

• Fatigue
• Coughing
• Headache
• Irregular breathing
• Dizziness
• Overall paleness
• Nausea
• Cherry red lips and ears
• Fatigue
• Coughing
• Headache
• Irregular breathing
• Dizziness
• Overall paleness
• Nausea
• Cherry red lips and ears
• Never use a gas oven or stovetop for heating your home.

There are a number of steps you can take to minimize the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning, including:

• Have your chimney, appliances and heating equipment inspected and tested by a qualified professional every year.
• Install ventless heaters in accordance with manufacturer specifications, never using them as a primary heat source.
• Install at least one carbon monoxide detector in your home. Do not rely on carbon monoxide detectors as a substitute for maintaining appliances, heating equipment or chimneys. If you do choose to install a carbon monoxide detector, use it as an additional preventative measure.*
• Clear snow and ice from exhaust vents and intake air vents for gas appliances to prevent carbon monoxide from accumulating in your home.
• Never use a gas oven or stovetop for heating your home.

*You should make sure that any carbon monoxide detector you consider for purchase is listed by Underwriters Laboratories (UL) to the current UL 2034 standard, “Carbon Monoxide Detectors.” National Fuel does not endorse or recommend any specific brand of carbon monoxide detector.

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The essential work done by Meals on Wheels for Western New York is made possible by generous financial support from community members, local foundations and corporations, as well as through grants from the New York State Office for the Aging and Erie County’s Departments of Senior Services and Social Services.

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Meals on Wheels for Western New York would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their recent donations and generous support of Meals on Wheels.

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