Volunteer Spotlight: University at Buffalo Interns Gain Real-World Experience While Giving Innovative Solutions

Meals on Wheels for Western New York actively provides internship opportunities for area students each year. This spring we had the opportunity to host a group of industrial engineering graduate students from the University at Buffalo. Three students approached us with interest in including Meals on Wheels on a project centered on advanced analytics and organization science.

The students - Vineet Payyappalli, Jessica Dorismond and Prabakar Theivaraaj - began by meeting with the MOW leadership team to learn about our processes and the current challenges we experience. From the beginning, Theirvaraaj noted the support of MOW leadership as they "entrusted us with the success of the project and provided us with every possible resource to work on it."

After learning the details of Meals on Wheel’s daily meal production and delivery processes, the students decided they could help optimize the pack-out process for delivering meals. Due to the nature of our program, it is a very complicated process. Not only do delivery routes, clients who receive meals, and total number of meals fluctuate daily, another factor is varying types of meals. One of the key components of our program is our five diet offerings for different nutritional needs, and it is important that clients receive the type of meal that is prescribed to them or there can be serious consequences. Taking all of these factors into account, the students wanted to increase the efficiency and accuracy with which the meals were prepared for transport to our 25 home-delivered meal sites.

The students conducted extensive analytics over the mid-portion of the semester, working with various members of the Meals on Wheels and Bateman Community Living team, offering the interns “a platform to apply as well as strengthen technical and interpersonal skills,” noted Payyappalli. Through their analysis, the students worked to develop a new pack-out template that would improve accuracy and efficiency of our processes as we deliver food and friendship each day.

After a two-week trial using the new template, the analytics were deemed a very good fit with our operations systems. They will help improve accuracy of tracking and enable staff and volunteers to serve meals more quickly. Dorismond commented that she is thrilled “to work with an organization that respects and utilizes the solutions we recommend.”

The project proved beneficial to all involved, as the students gained real-world work experience that improved their analytical and teambuilding skills, Meals on Wheels employees and volunteers gained improvements to enhance our processes, and our clients continue to receive high quality meals as efficiently as possible.

The successful project has opened the door for phase 2, which is coming soon. Stay tuned!
Meals on Wheels for WNY (MOW), the second largest home-delivered meals program in the nation out of more than 5,000, is generally regarded as a leader in the field. The organization's team members and volunteers continue to share – and be recognized for – their passion and expertise both locally and nationally.

• **Jennifer Carland**, RD, CDN, has been appointed Nominating Chair Elect for the Western New York Dietetics Association (WNYDA) Board of Directors. She will serve a two-year term, as Nominating Chair Elect from 2017-2018 and Nominating Chair from 2018-2019.

• **Tara A. Ellis**, President & CEO
  - Was honored as one of Buffalo Business First's Power 100 Women. Buffalo Business First editors and reporters ranked the 100 most influential women in the region’s business community and named Tara number 94 on this list.
  - Has been appointed President of the Meals on Wheels New York State Board of Directors as well as a member of the Governance/ Nominating Committee.

• **Rachel Leidenfrost**, Chief Communications Officer
  - Was recognized by The Junior League of Buffalo as Member of the Year of the Membership Council for the 2016-2017. She has been a member of The Junior League since 2014 and served as the New Member Director in 2016.
  - Completed the Health Leadership Fellow Program in April. The HLFP, which is funded by the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York, is an 18-month leadership program designed to build collaboration skills and community capacity.

• **The MOW Health & Wellness Committee** was named a finalist in Business First’s Healthiest Employers Competition. We were nominated by our partner Walsh Duffield Companies, Inc. Our employee-run committee plans a wide array of activities throughout the year, including movement challenges, weight loss competitions, healthy cooking contests, walking days, yoga, meditation, stress reduction techniques, employee health education and more.

• **Chris Procknal**, Chief Operating Officer
  - Received Buffalo Business First’s prestigious Buffalo 612 C-Level Executive Award at the end of 2016, honoring world-class leaders in the WNY area who have had a considerable impact on their organization. The award recognized her invaluable role in many initiatives, including onboarding a new food vendor on a short time schedule, introducing new diet options for clients, and spearheading the customization and introduction of our client management system.
  - Has been appointed to the Board of Directors of Presbyterian Senior Care of Western New York, where she will serve a three-year term.
  - Has been appointed to the Board of Directors for Meals on Wheels New York State.

• **Donna Sutz**, Social Worker, was recently awarded the Exemplary Service Award by The Council on Elder Abuse. This award is given to an individual, group, or agency “who has made significant contributions in the area of elder abuse and outstanding effort to promote the safety of seniors in Erie County.”

• **Walsh Duffield Companies, Inc.** was honored with the “Commitment to Service” award at the VolunteerWNY “Why Not You” awards ceremony due to their tremendous support of MOW. Walsh Duffield is an Adopt-A-Route partner for Meals on Wheels and is an annual donor for Plate Expectations. Their leadership actively supports MOW. President and COO Ted Walsh takes part in meal delivery and encourages employee involvement. Vice President Steven Mayo serves on our Plate Expectations committee, is a Foundation Board member, and is a long-time meal delivery volunteer.

• **Lisa Woodring**, Chief Development Officer, was a featured presenter at a national conference put on by the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Program, National Council on Aging, and the National Institute of Senior Centers. She delivered a presentation with Malcolm Murray from Citymeals on Wheels called “A Fundraising Fit for All: Urban, Rural and Suburban.”

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**Caregiver Corner:**

**Be Aware of the Signs of Depression**

Life brings change, and for the aging population this includes everything from medical issues to the loss of loved ones and struggles with independence. It’s normal to feel sad or experience stress due to these changes, but after a period of adjustment many people feel well again.

Depression is different. It is **not** a normal part of aging, a sign of weakness or a character flaw. It is a medical condition that interferes with daily life and often requires treatment.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, some signs and symptoms of depression include experiencing several of the following for at least two weeks:

- Persistent feelings of sadness, anxiousness, or “emptiness”
- Loss of interest in hobbies and normal activities
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Decreased energy and fatigue
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Restlessness, irritability
- Sleep problems
- Appetite and/or unintended weight changes
- Aches, pains, headaches, digestive problems without a clear physical cause or that do not ease with treatment

Symptoms of depression can vary greatly from person to person, making it difficult for others to recognize. If you think someone you care for has depression, the first step is to talk to a doctor or mental health professional. More information can be found on the National Institute of Mental Health website at [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/index.shtml).
Moving into the second half of 2017, we’d like to share and celebrate the generosity of our supporters.

The year began with the conclusion of the annual Subaru Share the Love Campaign, in which Subaru of America, Inc. donated $250 for every new Subaru vehicle purchased or leased to the buyer’s choice of charities. For the fourth year in a row, West Herr Subaru selected the Meals on Wheels Foundation of Western New York (MOW) as the local charity of choice. In May, Subaru of America and West Herr Subaru presented us with a check for $44,147. Over the past four years, MOW has received $183,142 total from this campaign. We are so grateful to Subaru of America and West Herr Subaru for their support.

Special thanks to West Herr Subaru owner and President Scott Bieler and General Manager Chuck Hardy, who is also a Foundation Board Member.

This spring, our annual fundraiser, Breakfast of Hope, brought 121 attendees to MOW, raising approximately $25,000 in cash and pledges. We’d like to thank everyone who helped, attended, donated and invited others to attend.

We were awarded a $21,000 grant by the First Niagara Foundation to fund the creation of a temporary, part-time Workforce and Business Development Coordinator position. This person will deepen and broaden our relationship with groups such as Aspire, who assist with office work. The coordinator will formalize and expand our internship and skills-building opportunities throughout the organization as well. The other piece of the position will be to increase rentals of our Community Learning Center to provide a steady, reliable source of revenue to MOW.

Finally, we’d like to thank everyone who purchased flowers through our spring plant fundraiser. We netted $3,998 – a 29 percent increase over last year!
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.

Recent Sponsors & Supporters

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

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JOIN US FOR A Hunger & Hope Tour

Go on a sixty-minute behind-the-scenes emotional journey to get to know Meals on Wheels. In this free, no obligation tour of our facility you will learn more about why Meals on Wheels matters through client, caregiver and volunteer stories.

**UPCOMING TOUR DATES:**
- September 12 at 4 p.m.
- October 5 at 8 a.m.
- October 17 at 12 p.m.

Learn more or register for a tour online at [https://mealsonwheelswny.org/hunger-hope-tours/](https://mealsonwheelswny.org/hunger-hope-tours/) or contact Lauren Hibit at lhibit@mealsonwheelswny.org or 716.822.2002 x42.