

Hamburg's Graim named COO of Meals on Wheels

By Michael Petro
HAMBURG SUN EDITOR

Kathleen Graim of Hamburg spent 30 years working at Tops Markets.

She started her career as a store associate and has spent the past two decades taking on various roles in the corporate office.

It was through that work that she was able to learn about management, operations, merchandising, food safety, marketing, customer service, training, sales development and community relations.

When she decided to take a leap of faith and leave her longtime employer last month, it had little to do with being unhappy and everything to do with taking all that she's learned and using it to fulfill a bigger mission by helping others.

Graim was named COO for Meals on Wheels for Western New York, a nonprofit organization delivering food, friendship and well-being checks to the homebound elderly and disabled.

"There is more to life than cans and bottles," said Graim, who most recently served as a merchandising and training specialist. "To be able to give back everyday is important.



Contributed photo

Kathleen Graim followed a calling to aid in the mission of Meals on Wheels for WNY, spawning a career change for the Hamburg resident.

You meet individuals who are volunteers and open up their hearts and want to make a difference. And to go into a client's home, knowing that you can perhaps be their only contact of the day, and you're checking on their well-being, that's an incredible task."

For the last several years,

Graim had been a donor and volunteer for Meals on Wheels, and her belief in the organization grew stronger and stronger – enough for her to eventually make a change in career.

Meals on Wheels for WNY serves nearly 900,000 meals annually to homebound seniors and disabled individuals throughout the county who have limited ability to prepare meals for themselves. The organization also produces approximately 230,000 meals for mobile seniors healthy enough to visit congregate dining centers.

"I got a really good understanding as far as what the volunteers do and what the agency does for the Western New York community," she said. "I'm very fortunate that I've been given this opportunity to make a difference."

Graim will oversee the nutrition, site services and social work departments as COO. She will be the primary liaison in negotiating county contracts, the lead on securing new business and will assist with product roll-outs and other special projects.

"Kathy is a dedicated professional and a long-time friend of Meals on Wheels," said Chris Procknal, president and CEO of Meals on Wheels. "She brings an impressive level of experience to

the team and will be instrumental in enabling us to continue to meet the evolving needs of today's older adults."

Graim said she'll be focusing on creating a food contingency plan that in the case of an emergency, clients can still be fed. She added another task will be continuing a strong relationship with Erie County and the Department of Senior Services.

She has already been visiting some of the 25 local Meals on Wheels sites to talk to facility managers to help "make their lives easier," as well as dietitians and the social work team. Additionally she said it's essential to talk with clients to make sure they are satisfied with the food and timeliness of the service.

"It's really about improving the relationships that we have," said Graim, who earned an undergraduate degree in accounting from the University at Buffalo.

The position requires taking a hands-on approach, something Graim is not bashful about doing.

"I think you need to get out there and understand who your audience is," she said. "You earn a paycheck from Meals on Wheels but I think the clients are the ones that we have to be most concerned about."