

The History of Bloomington Eden Prairie Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels is a community-based, nonprofit service that delivers hot, nutritious meals to people who are homebound and unable to prepare meals for themselves.

Meals on Wheels began in the United Kingdom during World War II when many civilians were displaced by the bombing of London and other large cities in southern England. The Women's Volunteer Service for Civil Defense responded to the needs of those who could no longer cook for themselves by preparing and delivering meals. They also took refreshments to servicemen in canteens during the war; it was from these canteens that the term "Meals on Wheels" originated.

It wasn't until 1954 that the home-delivered meals concept appeared in the United States. The Lighthouse, A Red Feather settlement house in the industrial neighborhood of Kensington in Philadelphia, established a Meals on Wheels program based loosely on the English model. The first volunteers were called "Platter Angels". Other programs established in the 1950s included the Columbus, Ohio effort begun in April 1957, and projects started in 1958 in Rochester, New York and East Orange, New Jersey.

For the most part the early projects shared features common to Meals on Wheels programs today: a single, well-balanced, hot meal, five days a week, planned by a nutritionist, prepared in the kitchen of a community institution or restaurant, and delivered by volunteers using their own cars.

Bloomington Meals on Wheels

Volunteer home delivery of hot meals began on a small scale in Hennepin County in September 1968 when two Bloomington congregations – Oak Grove Presbyterian and St. Luke's Lutheran – provided meals prepared in a local restaurant. Volunteers not only delivered meals, but spent afternoons visiting with the recipients. Soon Oak Grove joined with St. Stephen's Lutheran Church and St. Edward's Catholic Church in a task force that met from October 1969 to March 1970, laying the groundwork for a structured home-delivered meals program.

The first formal Meals on Wheels program in the metro area, structured as the all-volunteer, community-based effort we know today, began on March 29, 1970, when the Bloomington Meals on Wheels program started delivering meals two days a week to seven clients. The meals were prepared at the Meri-Manor restaurant. A few months later, in October of that year a five-day-a-week service was inaugurated and the first coordinator, Ann Mykleby, was hired to supervise volunteers and manage the program administration.

From February 1972 through November 1974 meals were prepared along with the school meals at Westwood Elementary School. A cook was hired to work out of Oak Grove Presbyterian Church to prepare the meals during school vacations. In November 1974 the Creekside Community Center opened and worked cooperatively with the city and the Meals on Wheels program to begin providing a congregate meal program and the delivered meal program. The

city provided space, equipment and utilities and MOW provided staffing, menu planning, food and supplies. In 1975 the city began paying the head cook's salary and in 1976 began paying all of the cooks' salaries. In 1978 the Meals on Wheels program reverted back to a delivered meal program only. The city took over supervision of the kitchen but the Creekside meals remained the catering source for MOW.

The next move took place in 1994 when Meals on Wheels moved its offices and meal preparation from Creekside Community Center to the Gideon Ponds/Presbyterian Homes in Bloomington. After 12 years, in May of 2006, the Bloomington Meals on Wheels office and meal distribution moved to St. Stephen Lutheran Church at 8400 France Avenue South where it remains today.

There have been four caterers with whom the program has contracted to provide meals at the current location, including Lettuce Catering, Open Arms of Minnesota, Taher Catering, and the Kitchen of Opportunities (KOO). The KOO is the first local kitchen devoted to serving Meals on Wheels clients throughout the Twin Cities and is a joint project of Metro Meals on Wheels and its 32 local member programs. With a focus on fresh ingredients and from-scratch recipes, Meals on Wheels clients receive nourishing meals that taste good. Professional chefs from Open Arms of Minnesota, who work with KOO to produce the food, have a well-earned reputation for producing tasty and nutritious meals.

Meals on Wheels of Eden Prairie

Meals A La Car, a program of People Reaching Out to People, began providing meals to five customers in Eden Prairie. In 1992 Meals ala Car became an independent program. The name was changed to Meals on Wheels of Eden Prairie in 2000. The program was founded by St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Wooddale Church, Pax Christi Catholic Community, United Methodist Church, Eden Prairie Presbyterian Church and the Eden Prairie AM Rotary. From 1992 to 2003 the meals were prepared by and picked up at Castle Ridge Care Center. From 2003 through 2011 meals from a variety of food vendors were heated in the kitchen at St. Andrews Lutheran Church. In 2011 the program moved to the City of Eden Prairie City center with two different food providers who both went out of business. From 2012 through 2014 the program was located at PROP (People Reaching Out to People), the Eden Prairie food shelf.

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In December of 2014 the Board of Directors of Meals on Wheels of Eden Prairie dissolved the organization effective January 1, 2015. Bloomington Meals on Wheels Board of Directors changed the name of the program to Bloomington Eden Prairie Meals on Wheels effective January 1, 2015. All assets of Eden Prairie MOW were transferred to Bloomington Eden Prairie MOW to allow the organization to efficiently continue providing meal services to both cities.