

HER VIEW

Volunteer drivers are real celebrities

This March, hundreds of local Meals on Wheels programs across the country have been reaching out to their communities to build the support to enable them to deliver nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks to America's seniors all year long.

It was on March 22, 1972, that President Richard Nixon signed into law a measure that amended the Older Americans Act of 1965 and established a national nutrition program for seniors 60 years and older. For nearly 45 years, these critical programs — commonly referred to as Meals on Wheels — have delivered more than just nutritious meals to homebound seniors in virtually every community across the country.

The dedicated staff and volunteers who deliver these meals each week provide a vital lifeline and connection to the community, which are sometimes all it takes to keep our senior neighbors at home, where they want to be.

Locally, the program was started in the 1980's as the Home Delivered Meal Program through the Community Action Agency. At that same time, there was a "fee-only" Meals on Wheels Program that was started by Phil and Lillian Rick, with the meals coming from Hillsdale County Medical Care Facility.

In 1994, Hillsdale County Senior Services Center took over the Home Delivered Meal Program from CAA and also was approached to take over the Meals on Wheels program. The two programs were merged, and with the addition of the Perennial Park facility in 2003, the Center was able to prepare all of the Meals on Wheels and Congregate meals on site.

Both Meals on Wheels and Congregate lunch programs were done with grant funding through the Older Americans Act and Region II Area Agency on Aging, who administered the grant funding and senior programs for seniors in Hillsdale County. With the senior millage funds approved by voters originally in 1997 and again in 2004 and 2008, the center continues to provide hot, home-delivered meals



NANCY HASTINGS

five days a week to seniors throughout Hillsdale County.

Across the country, Meals on Wheels programs have come together each March since 2002 to celebrate this proven collaboration of local community organizations, businesses, all levels of government and compassionate individuals to ensure that our seniors are not forgotten.

At Perennial Park, Deputy Director and Communications Coordinator Steve York organized a week of local celebrities to ride along with some of the volunteers who deliver weekly. Though I've done deliveries myself through the Hillsdale Kiwanis Club, I agreed to be assigned to a driver to write about what they encounter. In a story, I described what motivates them to do this very important service, leaving my own impressions for a column.

I was paired with a couple who has been delivering meals for 11 years and was impressed with their diligence and passion for the weekly task. For them, it's an hour each week to check up on friends who look forward to their visits. They not only deliver the hot meals, they do well checks to make sure these older folks are safe and healthy.

As I witnessed these visits, it reminded me of the rewards and gratification that comes from helping others. By volunteering, these folks ensure the seniors on their route can live more healthy, happy and independent lives.

Though my picture was taken by York as a celebrity participant, I felt like this couple acted as the real celebrities because of the time and effort they devote to the program.

Hats off to all the volunteers who do this on a regular basis! Your efforts are truly appreciated!
—Nancy Hastings is a Daily News staff writer and can be reached at nhastings@hillsdale.net. Follow her on Twitter: @nhastingsHDN.