



Behind the Wheel

Volume 11, Issue 2
Spring 2023

Published four times per year by AgeWell Services, 275 W. Clay Ave., Suite 100, Muskegon, MI 49440

UNPRECEDENTED NEED:

Rising Costs, Increased Demand and Shrinking Funds Means Some Seniors Waiting for Services

This is the story of two seniors. These women, aged 78 and 86, live alone and have trouble fixing meals to keep their nutrition levels where they should be. Both women suffered from being underweight and malnourished. Both women called to request Meals on Wheels, and that is where the similarities end.

For Doris Hagood, 86, taking care of herself and her family has been hard-wired into her whole being. She was widowed at 38 with three children to raise. But now her arthritis has so damaged her hands, she couldn't hold a knife, couldn't open a can or prepare a healthy meal for herself without great pain. Her daughter convinced her to try Meals on Wheels for two weeks.

"I was actually totally surprised," Hagood said. "They were really, really good meals. There's a lot of variety, always a fruit and a vegetable. I get lunch and dinners now. I don't know what I would have done without it."

Her primary care physician also is convinced the balanced nutrition has helped Hagood improve her blood sugar and cholesterol levels.

"I felt so much better than before," she explained. "It also helps me emotionally just knowing the food will be there for me. It's security and peace of mind."

Like many meal participants, Hagood makes a monthly voluntary contribution to help cover the costs of her meals. All participants are asked to contribute what they can.

Unfortunately, those costs continue to increase. In November 2022, food costs were 46% greater than they were in November 2021.

Since AgeWell Services' fiscal year ended, September 30, 2022, demand for all services continues to increase, exploding throughout the winter months.

At the end of the first quarter, December 31, 2022, AgeWell Services was burning through its allotted budget for meals and medical transportation much faster than expected.

"At our current pace, we potentially could be more than \$1 million short by the end of the fiscal year," Executive Director Kris Collee said. "We had to make some very tough decisions, ones that we don't like to make because we know it hurts seniors."

Unlike Hagood, when a 78-year-old woman recently called to request Meals on Wheels, she was placed on a wait list and referred to the Community Access Line of the Lakeshore (CALL) 211 and was given a list of local food pantries.

"She was so alone and isolated and very much in need and I couldn't help her," said Annette Thompson, Mission Services Lead Program Assistant. "All I could do was put her on the wait list for an unspecified amount of time and tell her we would call her when we are free to onboard again. She was crushed. I was crushed."

It's not just meals experiencing unprecedented demand. The Senior Medical Transportation program has increased dramatically this past winter as well, forcing new riders onto a wait list. With a limited number of vehicles, volunteer drivers and increased fuel costs, it's another program facing potential budget shortfalls.

"None of these decisions are easy," Collee said. "I hate having to defer people who truly need our services, but until more funding becomes available, we have to do everything we can to make sure we can be there for those in the greatest need."

Congratulations Gordon Merton!

Gordon Merten of Hart Township was named 2022 Citizen of the Year by the Hart Rotary Club for his long-standing work with AgeWell Services' Meals on Wheels program and other community service.



Pictured above with his wife Janice (left) and Advancement Director Diane Smith (center), Gordon determines nutritional needs for adults 60 and over in Oceana County. The Mertens deliver meals to homebound adults, and they raised \$3,000 for Delivering Hope to help feed seniors.

From the Director...



Dear Friends,

The predictions all look grim. Demand for services is increasing dramatically, and we are burning through our funding faster than expected. For a service nonprofit like us, that means we could be forced to turn away people who need food, who need transportation, who need US!

Imagine having to tell you grandmother at the family potluck: "Sorry, Gram, there's nothing left for you!" Inconceivable! [To quote The Princess Bride!]

Together, with the leadership of our Board of Directors and our community partner agencies, we're doing what we can to head off the coming perfect storm as we move through this fiscal year.

We need assessors to determine which seniors need home-delivered meals, more commonly known as Meals on Wheels. We're actively recruiting volunteers to help break up the long delivery routes to ensure food is safely transported within the timeframe allowed.

We're applying for grants and additional funding to build additional freezer space so we can better prepare for the increased demand, but the funding sources simply aren't there in many cases.

We've expanded the hours at Tanglewood Park, offering evening exercise classes and opening early to give more access to the exercise equipment.

And, we're asking you to help. For the first time, we've enclosed a donation envelope in this newsletter. Could you spare a couple hours every week to help deliver meals or transport a senior to a medical appointment? The gift of your time is just as valuable as a cash donation!

One of the most fun ways you can support seniors is by attending the upcoming 8th Heels for Meals & More on Saturday, April 22, 2023 at the Trillium Event Center in Spring Lake. This fast-paced, exciting fundraiser is a wonderful way to learn more about AgeWell Services and all we do for seniors in our community. Please bring a friend! Tickets are available on our website at agewellservices.org/heels-for-meals.

I can't wait to see you there!

Kris Collee
Executive Director

Board of Directors

Board Chair

Tony Johnson

Vice Chair

Diane Cunningham

Treasurer

Rick Snellenberger

Secretary

Lorena Frederick

General Directors

Charles Koop

Delores Whittaker

D'Erika Nichols-Woods

Kayla Kolbe

LaTonya Beene

Ex-Officio

Karla Betten

Mission Statement

AgeWell Services invites you to redefine age!

We provide vital connections to keep you nourished, active, learning and living independently.

AgeWell Services of West Michigan

275 W. Clay Ave., Suite 100

Muskegon, MI 49440

Phone: (231) 755-0434

www.agewellservices.org

www.facebook.com/agewellservices

www.facebook.com/driftwoodcafetwp

www.facebook.com/awswellness

twitter.com/AgeWellServices

Wish List

Please make a contribution to help with rising costs, increased demand and shrinking funds.

- Help provide a one-way trip to a medical appointment. \$25
- Help provide a round trip ride to a medical appointment \$50
- Help provide meals for a homebound senior for one week \$55
- Help provide meals for a homebound senior for a full month \$225
- Help provide meals for a homebound senior for six months \$1,350
- Help provide meals for a homebound senior for one year \$2,700

Please make your gift using the enclosed envelope, or give online at agewellservices.org/support-agewell-services.

For questions, contact Advancement Director Diane Smith at 231-683-2651 or diane@agewellservices.org.



New Auction and Checkout Platform for Annual Heels for Meals & More

AgeWell Services of West Michigan is hosting its annual Heels for Meals & More event at 6 p.m. on Saturday, April 22, 2023 at Trillium Event Center, 17246 VanWagoner Rd., Spring Lake, MI 49456. This festive fundraising event helps raise funds critical to support older adults to redefine their age.

Throughout the fundraising event, guests will enjoy great food, signature drink, live music by Steffan CopenHaver, lead singer of the band Brena, auctions (live and silent), Best Shoe Contest and hand painted signature glasses. One of the most highly anticipated portions of the evening is the Best Shoe Contest. With six refreshed categories, attendees can enter the contest, show off their shoes and win prizes! This festive event is sure to knock your socks and shoes off!

New this year, the event will feature an easy online auction platform called ClickBid to assist with ticket purchasing and auction bidding. ClickBid is a local Norton Shores company specializing in online auction platforms and we're excited to partner with them this year. A few of many highlights include:

- **Purchase tickets.** You can purchase individual tickets at \$60 each and tables of eight for \$420. You can even update your guest information or forward directly to the other guests.
- **Pre-registration.** You can register for the event the week of the event. This means you'll get a preview of auction items one week ahead of time! Accessed through your internet browser, there's no app to download.
- **Mobile bidding.** Just imagine finding that perfect silent auction item, but you also want to purchase that signature glass you saw on your way in. You can easily do both now because you'll be able to bid on items on the move!
- **Easy checkout.** When you register, you will need to add a credit card to your ClickBid profile, which is a secure platform. At the end of the night, you can see exactly what you won, easily pick up your item and we can charge your credit card on file the next week. No waiting in line! Paying with cash or a check also are options.

We know this might be a little overwhelming, but don't worry! We are working on detailed instructions both before and during the event to answer any questions. We decided to go with this platform to make it easy and seamless for guests to get involved with the festivities.

Tickets are available for purchase now through April 14. To purchase tickets and learn more about available sponsorship opportunities, visit agewellservices.org/heels-for-meals.

Making Wishes Come True

Many of us wish for things we would like to have or have happen. AgeWell Services' Wish Lists are tangible items to help us support adults 60 and over. Generous donors have funded many wishes and made dreams come true.

Since 2016, \$38,017 has been donated to fund 24 wishes. From home delivered meals for a month, hot bags, food coolers, steam pans, plier staplers, heavy-duty utility carts and rolling storage racks, these basic items are practical to keep our kitchen producing meals to feed our hungry neighbors. Some gifts have paid off our Meals on Wheels delivery vans, helped us install safety cages and exterior graphics. The Wellness Center has been able to purchase fans, headsets and other equipment.

Recently, Jackie Engel, CFP, of BridgePoint Wealth Management made a gift of impact to reach our GivingTuesday goal to outfit all the senior medical transportation vehicles with new tires and new floor mats. Instead of sending her clients holiday cards and gifts, she shares the gift she makes in her newsletter.



"This does so much more than sending my clients a fruit basket," Jackie explained.

Along with this newsletter, wish lists are published with the Community Foundation for Muskegon County and the Community Foundation for Oceana County.



AgeWell Services of West Michigan
275 W. Clay Ave., Suite 100
Muskegon, MI 49440

WOULD YOU PREFER AN EMAIL VERSION OF THIS NEWSLETTER?

Is your name and mailing address correct?
Please contact Colleen G. Steinman with any changes:
Email: Colleen@agewellservices.org
Phone: 231-412-7966



TICKETS

On SALE NOW

AgeWell Services of West Michigan Presents

Heels for Meals & More

SATURDAY
APRIL
22 2023

6PM COCKTAILS
7PM DINNER

TRILLIUM
EVENT CENTER

Join us for a festive fundraising event that will knock your socks & shoes off!



Visit agewellservices.org/heels-for-meals for more information or to purchase tickets

Individual Tickets: \$60

Table of Eight: \$420