

COMMUNITY

Meals on Wheels offers food and friendship

Seniors, disabled so grateful for service, says local volunteer

By Christina Commisso
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Hopping out of her red SUV, with bags of goodies in tow, Steve White might remind you of Santa Claus.

Once a week, a handful of residents receive a visit from White — a cheerful Miltonian with a big heart and the energy to match.

Instead of shimmying down the chimney, she simply knocks on the front door. Instead of placing goodies under the Christmas tree, they're placed neatly on the kitchen counter. And instead of Tonka tucks and Barbie dolls, she delivers hearty soup, crispy salad and a warm entrée. On this sunny November afternoon, the main course is roast turkey with mash potatoes, gravy and carrots.

White does have a list, however. Checking it several times throughout the afternoon. She checks who's diabetic, who doesn't eat garlic and who prefers extra gravy on the side.

White is a Meals on Wheels driver. For 10 years she and husband Bruce have been visiting the homes of a dozen or so seniors and disabled people. For some Meals on Wheels recipients, that afternoon visit is their only visit.

"Some seniors are unbelievably receptive. In these situations, the door cannot open fast enough," said White, making her way to client number two on the list.

For two weeks, this recipient, a former nurse, has been receiving hot lunches from the organization. She was used to jumping into her car and going to the grocery store until a heart attack rattled her routine. No



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SPECIAL DELIVERY: Meals on Wheels volunteer Steve White makes her rounds at Allendale.

longer able to drive, the 76-year-old said Meals on Wheels is a bit of a change, but she's enjoying it.

"I like not having to clean the kitchen," she said with a laugh. "Plus, I'm not much of a cook."

She hopes by the end of the month, she'll be cleared to drive and could break in her brand new oven.

"It's a really good option for people coming out of the hospital," said White, a former family practitioner, before heading out for the next stop on the list.

Time is critical when delivering hot meals, explained White, while waiting for the elevator at a Millside Drive apartment building.

About five of her clients live in the apart-

ment building. "They feel a bit of anxiety if we're late. For some, this might be their only meal. They may not have extra food in the cupboard," she said as the elevator doors finally open.

Halfway through the list, she finds an apartment with the door unlocked — the elderly woman is expecting White.

"I was 100 per cent and then I had that stupid fall," the client said as White arranged her meal on the dining room table. "It's so nice to see you. It's nice to see someone."

The last stop of the day is at a small apartment building off Main Street where for three weeks now a former physiotherapist has been receiving visits from the Whites.

"I just like it because everyone comes here, and my son and daughter-in-law know

I have some food," she said, scoping out today's meal. "I always have to know what we're having."

Sherri Parkinson, executive director of Milton's Meals on Wheels, said there's an urgent need for volunteer drivers in town.

A small commitment of one to two hours a week will go a long way, she said.

"Our clients get to know their volunteers, and they form a nice bond with them. Some seniors will thank you for the lunch, they're not much into chatting, and others will invite you in for a cup of tea.

"Unfortunately, for some seniors, our volunteer is the only person they'll see for that day. If a family member is not close by, they know that everyday someone is going and checking on that relative."

If a client doesn't answer the door for volunteers, Parkinson is notified and she places a call with their family. "It's an added security check."

Meals on Wheels recipients pay \$4.50 per meal, which Parkinson said goes directly to the cost of the food. Each meal includes a salad — which is donated by the local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion — a soup, bread and crackers, a hot meal and dessert.

"It's one less thing (seniors) have to be concerned about," she said. "The meals are nutritious, home cooking. They're going to get what they themselves would make."

The organization serves about 50 clients a week and holds group lunches every Monday and Thursday, and on the third Wednesday of the month. Routes vary, depending on what kind of commitment the volunteer can make, and drivers are partially compensated for their gas.

"What we're doing assists seniors to stay home and live independently longer," said Parkinson.

For more information or to volunteer, email miltonmeals@gmail.com or call (905) 878-6699.

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