

WESTSHORE

West Shore Meals On Wheels celebrates 50th anniversary

By **SAMANTHA ANN ILLIUS**

West Shore Meals On Wheels has reached a milestone: 50 years of service to West Shore communities.

The 50th anniversary is important to the organization because it symbolizes that they have sustained and grown throughout the years, said West Shore Meals On Wheels Director Lynda Kovach. She compared West Shore Meals On Wheels to the original Lakewood Meals On Wheels that their branch was patterned after.

“They couldn’t meet the needs of their community, so they merged with West Shore Meals On Wheels,” Kovach said. “We feel extremely proud that for 50 years we’ve been able to service these community members,” Kovach said.

According to Kovach, throughout the week of Jan. 1, West Shore Meals On Wheels prepared and served approximately 223 lunches and 223 dinners. The combined total meals for 2022 was 31,291 meals.

Reading a 1974 newspaper article about West Shore Meals On Wheels, Kovach learned that the group served 24 lunches and 24 dinners five days a week.

In 1973, the group had 85 volunteers, today, they have 115 volunteers.

West Shore Meals On Wheels will be celebrating between now and its official anniversary on Dec. 6.

The non-profit organization was patterned after Lakewood’s Meals On Wheels by a group of church leaders who came together with the intention of bringing hot meals to those in need living on the West Side suburbs, said Kovach. Initially, the organization served Rocky River, Fairview Park, Westlake, North Olmsted and Bay Village. Today, West Shore Meals On Wheels focuses its efforts on Rocky River, Fairview Park and Lakewood.

West Shore Meals On Wheels will be celebrating between now and its official anniversary on Nov. 5.

In January, each participant will receive a cupcake from the Wild Flour Bakery bakery in Rocky River. Over the summer, recipients will receive soap pumps from Bath & Body Works. They will also offer a free day of meals in February, April, July and September.

In September, West Shore Meals On Wheels will host an open house at the Don Umerley Civic Center in Rocky River. This event will celebrate the organization’s donors and volunteers.

Kovach stressed the importance of having kept the same goals of providing home cooked, nutritious meals “delivered with a smile and a friendly knock at the door.”

“That is a lot to people,” Kovach said. “You have people who don’t get visitors, who maybe don’t go out of their home or their apartment, and they don’t interact with people.”

The conversations that happen during delivery are sometimes more important than the meals, Kovach said.

“The whole idea, [in 1973], was to really service [senior citizens],” said Kovach. “We have, through the years, realized there are other people besides seniors who need help.”

West Shore Meals On Wheels is available to anyone who needs it, from new mothers, to individuals with disabilities, to those who were recently discharged from the hospital.

Kovach stressed that there are no stipulations for receiving meals, anyone who needs meals can receive them. West Shore Meals On Wheels Fairview Park Kitchen Chairperson Chris Polomsky echoed this sentiment.

Kovach told the story of a new mother who came to West Shore Meals On Wheels for assistance. “She said, ‘listen, I have to cook for the kids, but I want something nutritious,’” Kovach said.

There is no time requirement on those who need meals, residents can sign up for just two weeks or several years. “We’re here to help the community,” Kovach said.

West Shore Meals On Wheels has two kitchens — the Fairview Park kitchen that serves Fairview Park, and a Rocky River kitchen that serves Rocky River and Lakewood.



Photo courtesy West Shore Meals On Wheels

Between their two kitchens, West Shore Meals On Wheels serves 85 community members, has 115 total volunteers and prepared 31,291 meals in 2022.

Meals are offered five days a week, but residents can opt out of days if they don’t require or want daily meals. One day of meals costs \$8 which includes lunch and dinner, Polomsky said.

Lunch typically consists of a sandwich, a salad, a dessert and a beverage, which is usually milk, said Polomsky. Dinner will typically include a main course, a vegetable and a fruit.

West Shore Meals On Wheels is unable to cater to specific diets because they don’t have a dietitian on staff, said Polomsky.

West Shore Meals On Wheels offers a scholarship program to those who are in financial need and are on Medicaid or SNAP. Those in need of the scholarship are only charged \$3 a day, which includes both lunch and dinner.

Money for the scholarship program comes from donors. “Without the donors, we couldn’t [offer that]. You can’t prepare lunch and dinner for \$3 a day,” said Kovach. “We’ve had wonderful, wonderful donors.”

West Shore Meals On Wheels does not receive any federal, state or city funding — their donations are from individual and corporate donors, said Kovach.

All meals are home-cooked. Popular dinners offered by West Shore Meals On Wheels include spaghetti and meatballs, ham and green beans, eggplant parmesan with baked ziti and sides

of scalloped potatoes, said Polomsky. “Anything you can think of that’s homemade, we make it,” she said.

In 1973, weekly dinner menus included Swedish meatballs, creamed baked chicken breast, ham loaf or salmon loaf with egg sauce, potatoes, rice or buttered noodles, vegetables and dessert, said Kovach. Weekly lunch menus included a sandwich made from beef, tuna fish, egg salad, or cheese, milk, relishes, a dessert and a beverage.

“The head cooks plan ahead so the menus vary weekly,” said Kovach.

Food used to prepare the meals comes from Aldi’s, GFS, Giant Eagle and Whole Foods. West Shore Meals On Wheels also frequently receives donations of items such as canned goods.

West Shore Meals On Wheels is run entirely by volunteers. Paid positions include head cooks, assistant cooks and volunteer coordinators.

West Shore Meals On Wheels is always looking for new volunteers and recipients. For more information, please visit www.westshoremow.org.

Contact this reporter at sillius@westlifefews.com or 440-871-5797.



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