

Milford Daily News, May 4, 2006
used with permission



DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY MIKE SPENCER

Charlie Abrahamson receives his lunch from Meals on Wheels volunteer Sandra Gavin yesterday at his home in Milford.

A WARM MEAL, A FRIENDLY FACE MEALS ON WHEELS

By Erika Lovley

DAILY NEWS CORRESPONDENT

MILFORD — Carmen DiTolve says his favorite days of the week are Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

"They're the days I get to see my ladies," said the 74-year-old retiree, grinning.

A volunteer driver for the Milford-area Meals On Wheels program, DiTolve, a lifelong resident of Milford, has delivered food Tuesdays and Wednesdays for the past 12 years.

At 10 a.m. yesterday, DiTolve and his "meal runner," 60-year-old San-

**"I'm a hermit. ...
Somedays the
volunteers are the
only people I talk to."**

Charlie Abrahamson
Meals on Wheels user

dra Gavin of Milford, busily packed hot meals into two enormous insulated lunchboxes in the bustling kitchen

of the Milford Senior Center. The pair delivered more than two dozen hot meals before lunchtime.

The Meals on Wheels program is run by Tri-Valley Inc. in Webster and serves 25 communities, including Bellingham, Blackstone, Franklin, Hopedale, Medway, Mendon, Milford, Millville, Upton and Uxbridge. The program is funded by the state and federal governments, as well as donations, according to program officials.

The Milford branch of the program serves almost 100 meals daily to local
MEALS, Page A5

Meals are appreciated

MEALS, From A1 elderly residents.

According to Tri-Valley congregate coordinator Carmine Janczyk, there are too many hungry elders and too few volunteers for the program to handle. She said the Millford program is in dire need of volunteer drivers, runners and servers.

"We need at least another eight people," said Janczyk, who added that current volunteers cannot always make their shifts. "We even need people to act as backup volunteers."

"The need is pretty bad," DiTolve added. "We are constantly looking for more people to help. Otherwise, it takes longer to get the meals out."

Gavin has volunteered for more than a year.

"I saw an ad in the church bulletin one day and thought it would be a nice thing to do," she said.

After packing the lunchboxes into the trunk of DiTolve's Jeep, the pair drove to one of their many stops. The meals they deliver can include anything from spaghetti suppers to soup or a turkey dinner. Dessert, fresh fruit and a pint of milk are included.

Special meal arrangements are made for elderly people with special dietary needs, such as low-sodium and sugar-free foods. Each meal is specially designed by a registered nutritionist.

At one stop yesterday, DiTolve unloaded two plastic containers out of the trunk and handed them to Gavin, who knocked on the front door of an old Victorian. The front door had been left unlocked and Gavin peeked her head in.

"Hello! Meals!" she called.

"Come right in!" answered Anna C. Porter, 92. Huddled on the living room couch with Kitty, an enormous orange and white cat, she beamed as Gavin handed over a container of vegetables and shepherd's pie.

"It's such a nice thing to look forward to," said Porter. "Five days a week Kitty and I get visitors."

For many elderly residents like Porter, deliveries from the Meals on Wheels volunteers are the only contact they have with



DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY MIKE SPRINGER

Meals On Wheels volunteers Sandra Gavin and Carmen DiTolve deliver meals in Millford yesterday.

the outside world.

"It makes it easier when you have to live alone," said Porter. "When you're alone, you don't want to cook."

The Meals On Wheels volunteers provide an important checkpoint on the seniors' well-being. DiTolve and Gavin said they both have made numerous friends on their routes with whom they make a point to stop and visit.

"We want to make sure they're OK," said Gavin. "We know when they're not eating, we know when they're not feeling well, and we let someone know."

One of DiTolve's favorite stops on his route is the home of 91-year-old Rita Maggiore of Millford. She is one of two surviving elders who DiTolve has delivered to since he began volunteering more than a decade ago.

"I call her the 'Bird Lady,'" he said, chuckling. "She always has a parakeet sitting on her kitchen table."

Inside the kitchen, Maggiore's parakeet, Baby, chirped, while a Shania Twain song plays in the background. Maggiore greeted Gavin and DiTolve with a warm hug.

"The stove is no more since my husband died," said Maggiore. "I lost to cook less and I lost

food delivered right to my door."

Clients aren't charged for the meals but may make a donation if they're able.

According to DiTolve, Meals on Wheels clients do not need to be single to receive meals.

Al Katinauskas, of Millford, credits Meals on Wheels for keeping he and his wife from going without hot meals. After his wife, Marie, suffered a stroke last year, Katinauskas, 63, said he found himself struggling to shop and cook on a limited budget while his wife recovered.

"(Meals on Wheels) is a blessing in disguise," said Katinauskas. "It's such a relief not to have so much shopping and cooking."

At the last stop, Charlie Abrahamson, 89, clapped his hands in excitement as Gavin entered his kitchen. Abrahamson said the volunteers give him someone to laugh at his jokes.

"I'm a hermit. I live alone in a six-room house and I barely get to talk to anybody," he said, pushing his walker around the kitchen floor. "Somedays the volunteers are the only people I talk to."

"This job really lets you see how people live," said Gavin. "It's sad how many people live alone, but it's nice to know we can do something to help."