

Meals on Wheels in dire need of volunteers

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Reading Eagle

Facing a shortage of meal-delivery volunteers, some Berks Encore staff wouldn't mind wishing upon a star for more manpower to deliver Meals on Wheels, if it would get results.

But their hope, short of wishing, is to alert good Samaritans to reach out by volunteering to aid homebound senior citizens.

"We are in dire need of Meals on Wheels volunteers, particularly in the past two weeks in the Mohnton/Morgantown and Douglassville areas," said Melissa Jablonski, Berks Encore vice president of marketing and development.

Carol Smith, manager of the Birdsboro Encore Center, which handles the two volunteer-depleted delivery routes as well as two others in Birdsboro and Exeter Township, said the center delivers an average of 60 meals a day, five days a week.

"I'd love to be able to call on 70 volunteers, but we are down to about 60," said Smith, who has been relying heavily on 78-year-old Frank Vroman of Fleetwood.

Vroman drives from Fleetwood to Birdsboro each day to help deliver meals where needed.

Smith said the Mohnton/Morgantown delivery route is about a 50-mile round trip and has about 15 clients. The Douglassville route is a 25-mile round trip with 18 clients.

Smith, 53, also said she is anticipating that in the next year or two many of her older volunteers, in their 70s and 80s themselves, will not be able to continue to deliver meals.

Meals on Wheels primarily serves a midday meal to seniors who meet certain homebound criteria, no matter their socioeconomic level. A suggested donation is \$2.50 a meal, Smith said.

"I urge people to volunteer, because it really is a wonderful experience," she said. "Sometimes a volunteer is the only person a homebound individual sees during a day until the next volunteer comes back."

Donna Boyajian, Meals on Wheels program director, said the entire program always could use more volunteers. There also is a need in the Laureldale and Leesport areas, she said.

Having a substitute list of four or five volunteers for each of Encore's six centers would be ideal, Boyajian said.

With 56 routes in the county, Meals on Wheels has about 900 volunteers, but that includes those who package as well as deliver meals.



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Carol Smith, manager of the Berks Encore Senior Center in Birdsboro, and volunteer Frank Vroman carry meals to another volunteer's car for the Meals on Wheels program.

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