

THE MEAL TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF MEALS ON WHEELS CENTRAL TEXAS



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“THIS HAS OPENED UP MY WORLD IN A BIG WAY”

“When I was living by myself, I started falling a lot. I hurt my back and my knees, and realized I couldn’t live by myself anymore. So I moved in with my daughter,” says 73-year-old Ida Haywood.

Asking others for help is a foreign concept to Ms. Haywood. After her divorce decades ago, she worked as a nurse in order to provide a better life for her four children. “I just felt like I could get all of my kids through school and they could get an education because I had a good job,” she recalls. “I worked at practically all of the hospitals in [Austin],” she says of her nearly 30-year career.

But shortly before she retired in 2005, she fell at work severely injuring her knee, which doctors eventually replaced. An auto accident later forced her to undergo a second knee replacement. Meanwhile, other health issues, including high

blood pressure and pre-diabetes, made living alone difficult.

She began receiving our nutritious midday meals, hand-delivered by dedicated volunteers, when she moved in with her daughter, Nicki. Nicki works during the day—so Ms. Haywood relishes the lunches and the visits: “[Meals on Wheels] gives me food my grandmother used to make. Black-eyed peas, greens, and squash—those are my favorite foods. And [the volunteers] are just magnificent people. I have somebody to talk to in the middle of the day and that helps.”

Often times, though, the older adults we serve need assistance beyond nutritious food. That was the case with Ms. Haywood. Moving in with her daughter made her feel helpless. “And that depressed me. It’s depressing not to be in control of your own life. My doctor put me on medication but that made it worse,” she recalls.



MOWCTX client Ida Haywood with the Chrome computer tablet she received through our Connecting Seniors with Technology program.

Her MOWCTX Case Manager Jennifer Sassano recommended our Telehealth Treatment for Depression (TTD). This free program, which is in partnership with the University of Texas’ Steve Hicks School of Social Work, provides free evidence-based treatment. Mental health counselors helped Ms. Haywood build the skills she needed to better manage her depression. “They helped me realize I was still in control of part of my life,

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"I'M DELIVERING FRIENDSHIP"

It was a television commercial that led Estella Akins to Meals on Wheels Central Texas. "I was watching TV and an ad came across that said 'if you have time, come volunteer with us'. I thought about that and I thought, 'you know, I need to do that'," she recalls more than two decades later.

Now 87-years-old, Estella Akins still delivers her Wednesday route, though these days she's older than most of the clients on her route. Giving back to her community has always been a priority in her life.

She was born in the East Texas town of Palestine and moved to Austin to attend college. After graduating from what was then

called Huston-Tillotson College in the early 1950's, she began a long career in education. Her late husband, Dr. Charles Akins, also spent decades as a local educator, and is the namesake of W. Charles Akins High School in Austin.

Just as it has since she first signed up to volunteer with us, Ms. Akin's meal route takes her through East Austin, the part of town in which she's lived since the 1950's. Gentrification in the area concerns her: "It feels like they are pushing the originals out and bringing in the new."

Asked why she continues to volunteer at an age when many others are slowing down, she says "I guess the main word is 'help'.

People need it. You have some that really need it. You want to be a servant. That's what God said, 'go out and be a servant'. I'm delivering friendship."



Longtime volunteer Estella Akins (l) delivers a nutritious lunch to MOWCTX client Gladys Shaw.

When asked how long she plans to keep delivering meals and friendship, she says "I'm trying to make it to 90. Like the old song says 'if the Lord is on my side', I believe I'll make 90!"



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"THIS HAS OPENED UP MY WORLD IN A BIG WAY" (cont.)

because I had felt like I wasn't in control of anything. Going through [TTD] made me realize my daughters weren't trying to take over my life, they were just trying to help me. [TTD] turned my life around," she says.

Meanwhile, our Connecting Seniors with Technology program has expanded her horizons. The

free service provided her with a Chrome tablet and 12 weekly training sessions on how to use the computer. Being online allows her to see her son who lives in Utah. "When he gets a break, he'll Skype. So it's like being able to talk to him and not feel so depressed because I can't see him. This has opened up my world in a big way," she says.

Asked what MOWCTX means to her, Ms. Haywood answers "it makes me feel gifted. The meals are wonderful and I love them. But it's not just the meals. Without [MOWCTX], I would probably be in a nursing home. I would probably be depressed again."