50 YEARS STRONG
ANNUAL REPORT

MEALS ON WHEELS
RAMSEY COUNTY











FALL 2026

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Dear Friends,

Fifty years is an extraordinary milestone. As I look back on the history of Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County, what strikes me most is not simply how much has changed since 1975, but how much has remained the same.

For five decades, our work has been rooted in this simple idea: **our community is stronger when we take care of one another**. A nutritious meal delivered to someone's home can support health and independence. A familiar face at the door can provide connection and reassurance. And when nonprofit organizations, school districts, local government, volunteers, donors and community partners work together, we can accomplish far more than any of us could alone.

This special 50th anniversary annual report is a little different—and a little longer—than our usual report. We think 50 years deserves extra space for stories from each of the Meals on Wheels sites. You'll meet people who illustrate what Meals on Wheels looks like across Ramsey County today: a client whose volunteers have become like family; a retiree who discovered that volunteering gave something back to him, too; church congregations that make hundreds of deliveries possible; public servants who have been delivering meals for nearly three decades; and programs adapting, growing and investing in the future.

I am especially grateful for the generations of people who built the organization I have the privilege of leading today. Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County has benefited from remarkable continuity of leadership and partnership over the years, while continuing to evolve alongside the community we serve. The population of older adults in our community continues to grow, and the ways people want and need to be supported at home must continue to adapt.

To everyone who has been part of this story—as a client, volunteer, staff member, board member, donor, funder, community partner or friend—*thank you*. Whether you have been with us for decades or have only recently become part of the Meals on Wheels community, you are helping carry this work forward.
It is an honor to celebrate the first 50 years with you. I look forward to what we will accomplish together in the years ahead!

With gratitude,

Denise Wickiser

Executive Director
Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County
denise@mealsonwheels-rc.org



RAMSEY COUNTY MEALS ON WHEELS BY THE NUMBERS

50
Years serving Ramsey County

9 MILLION
Meals delivered since 1975

206,150
Meals delivered in 2025

7
Community-based Meals on Wheels programs working together in Ramsey County

900+
Volunteers making meal delivery possible this year

71%
Clients who live alone

234
Client voices shared through our 2026 survey



50 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP IN RAMSEY COUNTY



In November 2025, nearly 100 friends and supporters of Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County gathered to celebrate an extraordinary milestone: 50 years of delivering meals, connection and care to our Ramsey County neighbors. The anniversary luncheon brought together people representing every part of our Meals on Wheels community—volunteers, current and former staff, clients, donors, sponsors, partner organizations and elected officials. It was a celebration not only of how far Meals on Wheels has come, but of the partnerships that have made five decades of service possible.

Ramsey County has been part of the Meals on Wheels story from the very beginning. In 1975, Ramsey County commissioners, staff and community members launched the Ramsey County Senior Citizens Consortium—today known as Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County—to create a coordinated, countywide approach to providing home-delivered meals to older adults and others in need. Fifty years later, that partnership remains strong. Ramsey County continues to be an essential partner in helping ensure that residents throughout the county have access to nutritious meals and the connection and wellness check that come with each delivery.

That history made it especially meaningful to welcome Ramsey County Manager Ling Becker and County Commissioners Tara Jebens-Singh, Mary Jo McGuire and Kelly Miller to the anniversary celebration. During the luncheon, County leaders presented a proclamation from the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners officially declaring November 7, 2025, "Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County Day."

"Celebrating 50 years of Meals on Wheels is a testament to the profound impact of delivering both nutrition and human connection to those in need," said Ramsey County Commissioner Tara Jebens-Singh. **"Ramsey County is proud to have been part of this origin story and deeply appreciates the volunteers and staff who have served our residents over the past five decades."**

The needs of Ramsey County residents will continue to change, but the idea that inspired this collaboration in 1975 remains remarkably relevant today: we can accomplish more when we work together. We are grateful to the Ramsey County staff and elected officials, our member organizations, volunteers, donors and community partners for building this legacy with us—and for helping ensure that Meals on Wheels will be here for Ramsey County neighbors for many years to come.

GIVING BACK IN RETIREMENT

At **Keystone Community Services,** Meals on Wheels is about much more than delivering nutritious food. Every meal delivered is also a connection, a friendly visit, and an opportunity to help older adults remain healthy, independent, and engaged in their communities.

Through Keystone's Senior Services, older adults can access a wide range of programs that support well-being and reduce isolation. From social and educational opportunities through Active Seniors to transportation assistance, volunteer opportunities, wellness programs, and technology classes that help older adults stay connected, Keystone works every day to ensure seniors have the resources they need to thrive.

Meals on Wheels volunteers are often the bridge to these additional services. They build relationships with participants and provide a reassuring presence that may be the highlight of someone's day. At the same time, volunteers frequently discover that giving back enriches their own lives as well.

Volunteer driver Dan Hartnett knows this firsthand. After retiring, he was looking for a meaningful way to spend his time and began delivering Meals on Wheels through Keystone.

"People used to tell me that when you volunteer, you get more back than you give," Dan says. **"But, to my surprise, it turned out to be true. People are happy to see me, not only because I'm bringing them food, but also because I might be the first person they see that day."**

Dan has been delivering meals for eight years and says the experience has given him a renewed sense of purpose. Seeing the challenges many clients face has deepened his gratitude and reinforced the value of human connection. As he puts it, **"Meals on Wheels has been good for me, too!"**

For Keystone, stories like Dan's demonstrate why Meals on Wheels has remained such an important community resource for decades. A delivered meal nourishes the body, but the relationships built through the program strengthen lives, foster independence, and remind older adults that they are valued members of our community.



Dan Hartnett, Volunteer Meals on Wheels Driver

STRONGER TOGETHER: CONTINUITY THROUGH CHANGE

January 2026 marked the beginning of an important new chapter for JFCS. Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis acquired Jewish Family Service of St. Paul, forming **Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minnesota**. The two organizations brought together more than 200 years of combined experience serving our community, including two established **Kosher Meals on Wheels** programs.

Although much was changing behind the scenes, our commitment to the people we serve remained constant. Throughout the transition, there were no interruptions to meal deliveries. Clients continued to receive the nutritious meals they rely on, delivered by familiar faces that provide the personal connections that make this program more than just a meal.

That continuity was made possible through the efforts of our dedicated staff and strong community partners. Their flexibility, collaboration, and shared commitment to clients helped us navigate a significant change while maintaining the high-quality service our clients count on.

Today, we are building on the strengths of both programs. By bringing together our knowledge, resources, and longstanding community relationships, we truly are stronger together.



Tonya Leaf, JFCS St. Paul Driver

Did you know? Meals on Wheels has expanded our special diet & cultural menus. Offerings include:

- Gluten-Free
- Dairy-Free
- Vegetarian
- Kidney Friendly (Renal)
- Mechanically Soft
- Pureed
- Kosher
- Halal
- Hmong
- Asian-inspired
- Latin-inspired
- Mexican

MEALS, FRIENDSHIP AND A LITTLE PURPLE RAIN

Growing up in suburban Ramsey County, Susan remembers a time when many of the roads around her childhood home in Mounds View were not yet paved. One of her neighbors back then was a horse named Babe, who Susan used to feed apples.

And like many Minnesotans, Susan was a big Prince fan—although her connection to the Minnesota music icon went a little further than most. She once met Prince at a party and later performed as a dancer in the movie Purple Rain!

After a long career as a medical and health care administrator, Susan learned about Meals on Wheels through her hospice program. She signed up with **Mounds View Schools** Meals on Wheels and quickly came to appreciate the meals—her favorites are the salads and Salisbury steak. But what surprised her most was how meaningful the relationships with Meals on Wheels volunteers would become.

"The volunteers are absolutely wonderful and provide such kindness and compassion while delivering the meals," Susan says. **"Some of them seem like family to me, especially since I have no family members. My days are so brightened by these fun, cheerful visits."**

One volunteer even brings Ralphie, a beloved therapy dog, along for meal deliveries. Although Susan is living with a terminal illness, she credits Meals on Wheels with helping her stay as healthy and connected as possible during this time in her life.

"Thank you all for helping keep me alive and gracing me with your friendship, care and concern," she says. **"I am so very grateful."**

In one of his most famous songs, Prince called on us to get through "this thing called life." With good nutrition, caring connections and the friendship of her Meals on Wheels volunteers, Susan is doing just that—and bringing a little bit of her own Purple Rain story along the way.



Meals on Wheels client Susan with volunteers Deborah, Bob, and Kathy; with canine volunteer Ralphie

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

At the **Roseville School District** Meals on Wheels program, delivering meals is truly a community effort.

During just the first three weeks of this past month, 275 volunteers delivered 1,561 meals to Roseville-area residents. With 52 delivery routes heading out each week, keeping Meals on Wheels moving takes an extraordinary network of people willing to give their time—and a community that has embraced the program as its own.

At the heart of that network are Roseville Meals on Wheels' longstanding partnerships with 15 area churches. Delivery routes operate on a three-week rotation, with a Meals on Wheels coordinator at each church helping recruit and organize volunteers for its delivery day. Together, the churches routinely cover 110 of the program's 156 routes over each three-week cycle. A local corporation provides employees for another weekly route, while community volunteers step in to cover the rest.

Those volunteers come to Meals on Wheels in many different ways. Some make deliveries over their lunch break. Others are retired and looking for a meaningful way to give back. Still others make their route something they do with a spouse, family member or friend. But they share something in common: the satisfaction that comes from getting to know the people they visit along the way.

And Roseville clients notice. In the 2026 Meals on Wheels client survey, 98% of Roseville respondents said their delivery volunteer is always friendly, and 100% said they would recommend Meals on Wheels. Clients also reported that the program helps them eat healthier, maintain their health and continue living independently. But some of the most meaningful feedback couldn't be captured by a percentage.

"Everyone is special and do such a great job. Never in a bad mood. Makes you feel good and part of the world!! Thank you from the bottom of my heart!" one Roseville client wrote. Another shared, "**I deeply appreciate the meals and the people who deliver them. The meals are very delicious and the people are very polite and friendly.**"

Those comments capture something volunteers discover for themselves: a Meals on Wheels route is about much more than getting food from one place to another. A smile at the door, a familiar face and a few minutes of conversation can be just as important as the meal being delivered.

For Roseville's volunteers, making that connection takes about an hour. For the neighbors they visit, that small commitment can make a meaningful difference.



Meal bags await volunteers at Anpetu Teca Education Center in Roseville.

SHOWING UP, ONE MEAL AT A TIME WITH MEALS ON WHEELS

Every week, just outside downtown St. Paul, a familiar routine unfolds.

Judges and court staff from the Minnesota appellate courts gather, grab insulated bags, review delivery lists, and head out into nearby neighborhoods. They ring doorbells. They hand off meals. They pause for a brief conversation or a smile before heading back to work.



Emily and Ryan, volunteers from Minnesota Court of Appeals ready to deliver meals to Meals on Wheels participants.

By the late 1990s, court employees were already delivering meals through **Wilder's Meals on Wheels** program. Nearly 30 years later, that rhythm continues. It is a partnership rooted in presence.

A Longstanding Commitment

Emily, a Law Clerk with the Minnesota Court of Appeals, has been part of Meals on Wheels since 2007. In addition to delivering meals, she helps make the partnership work. She coordinates schedules, works around judges' and staff calendars, recruits new volunteers, and helps ensure routes are covered.

"When my kids were little, it was hard to find ways to fit service work into a full-time job and parenting," she said. "Meals on Wheels made it possible to stay engaged with the community in a real way, even during a busy season of life."

Now, with her children grown, Emily continues to advocate for the program within the court. It has become part of the culture.

Service as Public Engagement

The Minnesota Supreme Court is the state's highest court, and the Minnesota Court of Appeals is the state's intermediate appellate court. Judges hear appeals from district courts and administrative agencies, reviewing cases ranging from family law and civil matters to criminal cases. The work is demanding and often happens far from direct interaction with the people their decisions affect.

That distance is part of why Meals on Wheels has remained meaningful for many volunteers.

"We exist to serve the people of Minnesota," Emily shares. "It matters to be out there and be part of the community we serve."

More Than a Meal

Meals on Wheels is, at its core, about food access. But the impact reaches far beyond nutrition. Judge Tracy Smith began volunteering in 2020, during a time when isolation and uncertainty were widespread.

"With our concept of community so battered by the pandemic, I was grateful to do something that involved connection and trust between people," she said. "As a judge working at the Minnesota Judicial Center, I love seeing more of our neighborhood and getting to meet some of the people who live here."

For Judge Smith, the hour spent delivering meals is also a chance to connect with colleagues outside formal roles.

“I also love getting to know our law clerks and staff who volunteer,” she said. “It’s a fun, informal hour together away from the workplace.”

What stands out most to her is how much care exists beyond the program itself.

“It’s not just the support Meals on Wheels provides,” she said. “It’s the way neighbors and co-tenants look out for one another. It’s a reminder that all of us have important roles to play in supporting our community.”

A Shared Sense of Humanity

Judge Keala Ede came to the Minnesota Court of Appeals after serving in direct legal services and as a district court judge. Volunteering with Meals on Wheels brought back something he missed.

“I was motivated to volunteer because the opportunity to share food with people throughout our community is so fulfilling,” Judge Ede said. “The experience has been meaningful for me as a judge, public servant and Minnesotan.”

During deliveries, what stays with him is the simplicity of those moments.

“Meals on Wheels reflects some of our highest values, generosity and grace,” he said. “What stands out is the shared sense of humanity in that moment on a client’s doorstep, when you share not only a meal, but also a smile.”

Over time, some relationships last for years. Volunteers get to know residents who care for their buildings and greet them week after week. Others move more frequently, a reminder of the instability many people face. Each interaction matters, whether it happens once or over a decade.

Why Wilder Matters

Wilder’s Meals on Wheels program supports older adults and people with disabilities across St. Paul, offering meals alongside regular wellness checks and connections. Volunteers are often one of the few consistent points of contact someone has.

That consistency is why long-term partnerships like the one with the appellate courts matter so much.

They reflect a shared understanding that community is built through showing up. Not just once, but over time.

“It’s a special kind of care,” Emily says. “You help take care of someone, but it’s also gratifying. You see their reaction. You know it matters.”

Continuing the Tradition

Judges and court staff continue to make themselves available for deliveries. Some have carried the work with them even as their careers moved them to other courts. The commitment travels with them.

Meals on Wheels has continued at the appellate courts because it aligns with who they are. Public servants serving the public, in a way that is personal, practical, and deeply human.

One meal. One doorstep. One moment of connection at a time.

Reprinted with permission from Wilder. This article first appeared in Wilder's May 2026 Here For Good newsletter.

A NEW HOME, THE SAME CARING MISSION

This year marked an exciting new chapter for White Bear Lake's Meals on Wheels program as we began the transition to a new location in the **White Bear Area Schools**' Sunrise Park District Center. While moving is a significant undertaking, this change represents an important investment in the future of our program and our ability to continue serving older adults in our community.



The new MOW kitchen at Sunrise Park District Center in White Bear Lake

Our new facility provides an improved space for the many people who make Meals on Wheels possible each day. We are also excited to work closely with the district's Nutrition Department to provide fresh, cooked meals and share their new, state-of-the-art ovens and kitchen equipment. This collaboration strengthens our ability to prepare, organize, and deliver nutritious meals to the older adults who rely on our program.

Most importantly, the move does not change what matters most: our commitment to the clients we serve. Meals on Wheels is about more than delivering a nutritious meal. Each delivery provides an opportunity for connection, a friendly face, and a meaningful check-in that can brighten someone's day.

We are deeply grateful to our dedicated volunteers, staff, community partners, and supporters who have helped make this transition possible. Their flexibility, patience, and continued commitment have allowed us to navigate this change while keeping our focus where it belongs—on the people we serve.

As we settle into our new home, we look forward to building on the strong foundation of Meals on Wheels and continuing to provide nutritious meals, caring connections, and a sense of community for years to come.

2026 COUNTYWIDE MOW CLIENT SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

95% *would recommend Meals on Wheels to a friend*

84% *say it helps them continue to live independently*

84% *say Meals on Wheels helps them eat healthier*

91% *say Meals on Wheels provides at least half the food they eat in a day*

GROWING THE TEAM, STRENGTHENING THE MISSION

As demand for Meals on Wheels continues to grow, **Merrick Community Services** has strengthened the program by adding an MOW Assistant, Erin Ingram, to the team.

Tim Dooley, the Meals on Wheels Lead states "Coordinating Meals on Wheels is truly a two person effort, and I am thrilled to have Erin by my side."



Merrick MOW staff Erin Ingram & Tim Dooley

With Erin's addition, this team along with volunteers has been able to give greater attention to each part of the program while creating more efficient systems behind the scenes. The impact is already evident: since May, Merrick has enrolled 83 new Meals on Wheels clients—an average of approximately 20 new clients each month.

For Erin, those numbers represent something much more personal.

"Joining Merrick has been such an amazing experience," she shares. "I've held a multitude of jobs, but this is one of the first where I've felt like the work I do makes a genuine difference in people's daily lives."
Whether she is meeting participants while making deliveries, getting to know volunteers, or working alongside her new colleagues, Erin has quickly discovered the strong sense of community that makes Merrick special.

"I'm hoping my impact as the MOW Assistant is felt in the care and attention I give to our participants," she says. **"It's important to me that vulnerable adults and elders, who are often alone and overlooked, feel seen and heard."**

That care and attention are at the heart of Merrick's Meals on Wheels program. A meal can help meet an immediate need, but the familiar face at the door, a conversation, or simply knowing someone will be checking in can mean just as much.

Looking ahead, the team sees even more opportunity. Plans for the future include serving more participants, expanding Merrick's service area, welcoming additional volunteers, and continuing to improve processes such as meal ordering, delivery routing, and client enrollment.

As the program grows, its purpose remains simple: delivering meals, building connections, and making sure our neighbors know their community cares.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Senior Services Consortium of Ramsey County, dba Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County, coordinates a collaborative of seven community-based providers. Financial information presented here reflects Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County and does not include the separate operating budgets of our member organizations.

2025 Financial Snapshot

Total Revenue: $323,176

Total Expenses: $314,065

Change in Net Assets: $9,111

Looking Ahead

As we celebrate where we've been, we're also planning for where we're going. Our 2025-2029 Strategic Plan is focused on ensuring that Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County remains strong, responsive and sustainable for the years ahead.

Organizational Resiliency — Strengthen the infrastructure needed to meet growing community needs.

Community Awareness — Expand awareness of and connections to Meals on Wheels programs and services.

Financial Sustainability — Grow and diversify funding to meet increasing demand.

Platinum Transparency 2026

Candid.

Committed to Transparency

Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County is committed to responsible stewardship and transparency. Our financial information, IRS Form 990 and additional organizational information are publicly available through our Candid nonprofit profile. In 2026, MOWRC earned Candid's Platinum Seal of Transparency, its highest level of recognition for nonprofit transparency.

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RESOURCES FOR SENIORS IN RAMSEY COUNTY

Did you know Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County can help connect you with services beyond meals?

Our Resource Directory can help older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers find services that support health, independence, and aging at home. The directory includes free and low-cost resources available in Ramsey County and parts of Washington County, all provided by nonprofit or government organizations.

Resources include:

- Chore and home maintenance assistance
- Transportation
- Companionship and social connection
- Grocery delivery
- Financial assistance
- Caregiver resources
- Mental health support

mealsonwheels-rc.org/resource-directory

The directory was developed by an experienced licensed social worker and certified aging specialist and is updated annually to keep the information useful and current.
Looking for help? Visit the Resources page at mealsonwheels-rc.org. To request a printed copy or for additional assistance finding resources, call 651-371-7009.

Help Us Deliver the Next 50 Years

Your gift helps ensure that nutritious meals and meaningful connections continue reaching our neighbors for years to come. To donate:
givebutter.com/donateMOWRC



THANK YOU!

Since 1975, Meals on Wheels of Ramsey County has been built on a simple but powerful idea: a network of people working independently and collectively to advance the public good. As we celebrate this collective impact, we are grateful to the clients, volunteers, staff, partners, funders and community members who have shaped this story. Our commitment remains the same—to help people live healthy, independent and connected lives in the communities they call home. **On behalf of the Meals on Wheels network in Ramsey County, thank you for being part of our first 50 years. We look forward to delivering together for many more!**

In Memory of Vang Lee

We remember Vang Lee, Meals on Wheels Program Assistant at Wilder Foundation, who passed away unexpectedly in October 2026. We are grateful for Vang's dedication to the neighbors we serve.

MEALS ON WHEELS
RAMSEY COUNTY
Caring for nutritional needs