



**MEALS on WHEELS**  
WESTERN MICHIGAN  
CELEBRATING  
40 YEARS



WINTER  
2024/2025

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

# PRESIDENT & CEO UPDATE



## GREETINGS FRIENDS,

As we approach the end of another incredible year, I am filled with gratitude and awe for the collective impact of your support. In our 40th year of service to the West Michigan community, we delivered more than just meals - we delivered comfort, connection, and hope. Each meal brought to a door was a reminder to local seniors that they are cared for and valued. Whether it was the smile of a delivery driver, the phone call from a staff member, or simply the joy of receiving a favorite treat like chocolate milk, every act of kindness created ripples of positivity.

As we look to 2025, we are inspired to dream bigger and do even more. Keep reading to learn more about an exciting new initiative kicking off in 2025, Medically Tailored Meals! As the need continues to rise, we know seniors in our community are waiting for the warmth and nourishment we can provide. We are determined to meet that need, but we can't do it alone. Especially in the face of uncertain federal funding, your continued support will be critical as we strive to ensure that every senior has access to the care and resources they deserve.

On behalf of everyone at Meals on Wheels Western Michigan, thank you for your kindness, generosity, and belief in our mission. Together, we are building a community where no senior is hungry or forgotten. Wishing you and your loved ones a New Year filled with health, happiness, and hope.

Warmly,

Lisa Wideman | President and CEO

## RECIPE

### Beef Barley Stew

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES

COOK TIME: 50 MINUTES

SERVES 6-8

#### INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb beef steak, cubed	3 T burgundy cooking wine
2 T flour	2 1/4 c carrots, diced
1 tsp. salt	1 c celery, diced
1/2 tsp black pepper	1 1/2 c onions, diced
1/2 tsp dried basil	1 T minced garlic
1/4 tsp dried thyme	1 (15oz) can diced tomatoes
1/4 tsp dried oregano	1 (15oz) can brown gravy
1/8 tsp ground rosemary	1 tsp Italian seasoning
2 T olive oil	1 large sweet potato
	3 1/4 ounces dried barley

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- In a medium bowl, toss the beef in oil, then coat with flour and spices/herbs.
- In a Dutch oven or large cooking pot, with oil coating the bottom, sear off meat, turning cubes to get a sear on all sides. Deglaze with cooking wine, using a spatula to scrape the bottom of the pan.
- Add all veggies and mix. Add gravy, water, Italian seasoning, and barley.
- Simmer until the meat is tender. Serve warm with rolls, bread, or crackers.

Best served warm with rolls, bread, or crackers.

# SENIOR SPOTLIGHT

## MEET SANDY

Thanks to you, Sandy has been a familiar face at the Meals on Wheels Western Michigan (MOWWM) Community Dining Site in Wyoming for the past decade. Your generosity has made it possible for her to find a place where she radiates her positive energy every week. “The food is great, but I’m really here for the people,” Sandy says with a smile, reflecting on how much she treasures the friendships she’s made over the years. She considers her friends at the dining site her extended family; your support makes that possible. The fulfillment Sandy receives goes beyond meals. She also finds kindness and care from our staff. “The staff are wonderful. They really care, and it shows,” Sandy shares.



Sandy is a "Jill of all trades." Before retirement, she held various jobs—working as a custodian for the Grand Rapids Board of Education, a waitress, a printing press operator, a factory worker, and for Gordon Food Service. "I've done a bit of everything," she laughs, "but the job I am most thankful for is being a grandma and great-grandma." She beamed with pride, sharing about her 12 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

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As a widow, Sandy appreciates the structure and connection that the MOWWM Community Dining Site program brings her. Every week, she joins her peers to enjoy a meal, share stories, and play bingo. “It’s a reason to get out of the house, make new friends, and stay connected,” she says. “I don’t like looking at the same four walls all the time, so it’s good to come here. It means a lot.” Because of our dedicated volunteers and donors, Sandy enjoys her favorite meals, like the onion and beet salad, chicken salad sandwiches, and her personal favorite—liver and onions—each week at our dining site. “It’s the best meal I get all day!” she adds.

Sandy has a special message for those considering supporting MOWWM. “A lot of people would go hungry without you. It’s an amazing program for those living on the bare minimum or who just need companionship,” she says. Having experienced the importance of giving back firsthand, Sandy understands how vital this service is for seniors in need. “My husband and I always tried to find something in our budget for those less fortunate than us. It’s important to give back.” Thanks to your generosity, Sandy—and so many others like her—can thrive, stay connected, and feel supported.

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# MEDICALLY TAILORED MEALS

## INTRODUCING OUR MEDICALLY TAILORED MEALS

At MOWWM, we've always been committed to providing more than just meals. We deliver connection, care, and a lifeline to seniors in need. Now, we are proud to launch an innovative program that will further transform lives: Medically Tailored Meals (MTM).

This groundbreaking initiative is designed to address the specific dietary needs of seniors managing complex, chronic health conditions. With MTM, we aim to improve health outcomes, enhance quality of life, and reduce healthcare costs—all through the power of food.

Last year, MOWWM was accepted into the Food is Medicine Coalition Accelerator Program, selected as one of only four organizations nationally. After a year of monthly meetings, training, and site visits to Boston and New York City, MOWWM graduated from the program in June. Now, in partnership with Trinity Health, National Kidney Foundation, and Davita, we will be launching a pilot program in January 2025 for older adults with Chronic Kidney Disease.



**FOOD IS MEDICINE™**  
— COALITION —  
**MEMBER AGENCY**



Our MTM initiative begins with meals crafted by our registered dietitian and executive chef to meet the individual medical needs of each participant. The meals are made from scratch in our kitchen, delivered directly to the participant's home, and paired with Medical Nutrition Therapy. This ongoing nutrition education empowers individuals in the program with tools for long-term health management and well-being.

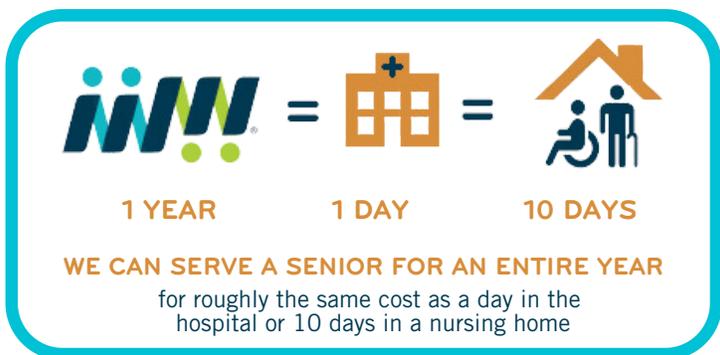
Leading the initiative is Paula Kerr, Director of Nutrition at MOWWM. Kerr is excited that this program will expand MOWWM's reach to support individuals whose needs we currently cannot meet. "What we do is feed people, we have the infrastructure, and it's a natural fit to expand our reach and provide more tailored care through meals and counseling," says Kerr. She is also excited to see food being used as medicine, noting that "It's like a prescription. It's not just a meal hand-off, but a meal tailored to a very specific medical need, along with nutrition intervention."



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Diet is one of the most critical factors in managing chronic diseases. Research has shown that programs like MTM can lead to a 50 percent reduction in hospital admissions and a 72 percent drop in emergency department visits. The financial impact is equally striking: for every dollar invested in medically tailored meals, our healthcare system saves nearly four dollars.



Lisa Wideman, MOWWM President and CEO, is eager to see how the program will expand beyond the initial pilot. Wideman shares, “We are bringing this emerging state-of-the-art intervention to Michigan to reach more people through the power of food.”

The state of Michigan has approved the use of Medicaid and Medicare funds for this service under approved health insurance plans, providing new opportunities for funding in the future. Additionally, this program could, at some point in the future, allow MOWWM to reach individuals not yet 60 but who otherwise qualify.

With MTM, we’re building a vision for a healthier future where seniors and people of all ages battling chronic illness can thrive, manage their conditions, and live with dignity. This program will position MOWWM as a key partner in healthcare, offering a model that can be expanded across Michigan and beyond.

Together, we can do more than fight hunger—we can transform lives. Your support of MOWWM allows us to pursue this vital new chapter in our mission! Thank you for making this work possible.

“  
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”



Members of the MOWWM team visited Community Servings in Boston to gain insight into advancing Medically Tailored Meals programs.

# PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

## OLIVER PACKAGING AND EQUIPMENT



You've probably thought about the food that MOWWM distributes, but have you ever thought about the packaging that makes it possible? That's where Oliver Packaging and Equipment comes in. Oliver's relationship with MOWWM spans decades, playing a vital role in our meal delivery process. Every Home Delivered Meal leaving our doors is carefully packaged in Oliver's signature black trays, sealed with their innovative easy-to-peel film and heat-sealing equipment.

Back in 1999, MOWWM partnered with Oliver during the research and development phase of their now Speedseal® Packaging System. In fact, their first marketing video was filmed in the former MOWWM kitchen on Cedar Street in NE Grand Rapids!

Oliver now partners with Meals on Wheels organizations nationwide, but we're especially grateful for their close relationship with us here at home. Their team consistently supports our mission by sponsoring and attending events, hosting food drives for our Senior Pantry, and volunteering their time. We're also proud to have their Director of Operations, William Dang, serving on the MOWWM Board of Directors.

Yvonne Johnson, Oliver's Senior Communications and Brand Manager, is grateful that their team stays involved with MOWWM, "For the tangible reminder of the almost 25-year mission of Oliver - to help Meals on Wheels organizations efficiently and effectively serve the seniors of our community a meal with a smile and social connection." They share the same hope as many of you: that seniors in West Michigan receive nourishment not just for their bodies, but for their hearts and souls as well. Thank you, Oliver, for helping us deliver nutrition to local seniors, in all its forms.



Oliver's Speedseal® Packaging System in action at MOWWM.



## KNOW SOMEONE IN NEED OF MEALS?

Reach out today and speak with an intake specialist to learn if our services are a good fit for you or a loved one. Call (616) 459-3111 or visit [mealsonwheelswesternmichigan.org](http://mealsonwheelswesternmichigan.org) to get started or learn more.

# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## DEB SMITH, 2024 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Did you know that over 1,000 volunteers donate their time and talent to MOWWM each year? Many of you, included! Each year, one of these remarkable people is given the MOWWM Volunteer of the Year Award for their dedicated service. If you've spent much time around MOWWM in 2024, you've probably been greeted by this year's Volunteer of the Year, Deb Smith!

As a dedicated administrative volunteer, Deb is the first person you'll see as you walk through the front door every Monday and Wednesday morning. She expertly fields phone calls, sorts the mail, and helps with administrative tasks while greeting volunteers and partners. She can also be found helping at our annual events such as the March for Meals Community Walk & 5K Run, More Than a Meal Luncheon, Emergency Meal Delivery Day, Chef's Specialty, and more. In 2023 alone, Deb donated over 375 hours of service!



Tim and Deb Smith with Volunteer Manager, Kayla, at the 2024 Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon.

Deb's husband, Tim, first started volunteering as a delivery driver back in 2021, and Deb found her own way to get involved shortly after. What Deb enjoys most about volunteering is talking to the clients and hearing their stories when they call in about their meals and other services. "Speaking with the clients, I know how much this means to them, and how important MOWWM is to keeping many of them in their own homes," Deb remarks. Thank you, Deb, for being such an integral part of our mission to nourish and support seniors in West Michigan!



SIGN UP TO  
VOLUNTEER!



JOIN THE FUN  
HERE

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**YOU** are needed in the MOWWM kitchen! Volunteers play a vital role in the production and plating of the meals for our Home Delivered Meal program. Volunteers 17 years old or older, or ages 13-16 with an adult are welcome. Join once or as frequently as you are able!

- Plating Meals
  - Fridays from 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- Prep Cook Kitchen Help
  - Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. or 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

# MARK YOUR CALENDAR

## MARCH FOR MEALS COMMUNITY WALK & 5K RUN



**Saturday, March 29, 2025**

All ages and abilities are welcome for this 2-mile community walk and 5K timed-run at Millennium Park! Registration open now at [mealsonwheelswesternmichigan.org](http://mealsonwheelswesternmichigan.org)

## MORE THAN A MEAL LUNCHEON



**Tuesday, May 13, 2025**

This free, table-hosted luncheon features our in-house catering and a lively program including trivia, an engaging speaker, and messages from our seniors.

## CHEF'S SPECIALTY



**Wednesday, October 15, 2025**

You don't want to miss this signature event featuring incredible food from local chefs and the MOWWM team, as well as an open bar and live auction.

## INSIDE THE ISSUE

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Meals on Wheels Western Michigan is supported by: