



## The History of Meals on Wheels of Wake County

### 50 Years of Service

1972

In February of 1972, the Urban Affairs Division of North Carolina State University called together a meeting of local church, civic, and professional groups to see if there was a need for a local home-delivered meal service in Wake County. Mrs. Shirley Lucey was chosen by the Urban Affairs Division to head the movement that was identified as an unmet need in Wake County. With little to no funds, facilities, similar programs, or a lack of federal funding for home-delivered meals, the ambitious group had their hands full to get a program up and running in Wake County.

After an exhaustive effort to find preparation sites, Wake Memorial Hospital agreed to supply 250 meals a week at \$1.50 per meal. Additionally, Hillyer Memorial Christian Church became an office space and pick-up point for drivers while the Wake County Chapter of the American Red Cross offered to transport the meals from the hospital to Hillyer. Churches in the area also began to sponsor their efforts and provided volunteer drivers to make up the original plan of five teams of drivers per day. In October, the name “Meals on Wheels of Wake County” was decided upon, and in December the first official board meeting was held.

1973



Hillyer Memorial Christian Church

1974

The Articles of Incorporation were approved by then Secretary of State Thad Eure in 1974, making the idea a reality in just two years' time. Operations in the Hillyer offices began on January 1st and in February, the first meal was delivered by Juliette Singleton, who went on to become a volunteer for 40 years. Money, volunteers, and recipients were often hard to come by in the beginning years. However, continued private funding, strong-willed personnel, and a growing need for delivered meals to the elderly and disabled kept Meals on Wheels of Wake County growing on the foundations built in their early years.



Juliette Singleton delivering the first meal to Mrs. Clarence Shore

Meal preparation at Wake Memorial Hospital



1980s

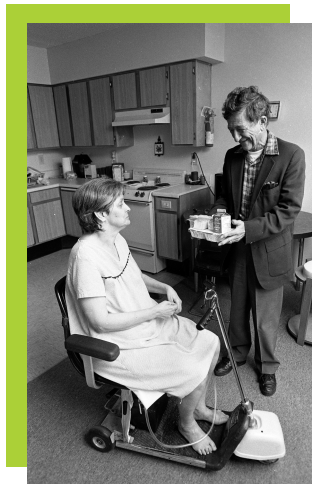
Vivien Keyes began a long and successful tenure spanning over two decades of growth as Executive Director. In 1985, the first satellite site was opened at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Cary, which still operates today. North Raleigh was the next site to open at North Raleigh United Methodist in 1987. These satellite points allowed Meals on Wheels to expand its services across the areas experiencing the most growth in Wake County.

1989

Meals on Wheels' influence in Wake County was set to rapidly expand after starting to receive funds through the Older Americans Act which officially saw the unified Meals on Wheels of America as a contracting agency for nutrition services. The OAA has long been the primary piece of legislation for supporting the social and nutritional needs of Americans aged 60 and older. Within the OAA, the Title III-C Nutrition Programs aim to reduce hunger, promote socialization, and improve the health and well-being of older adults. Additionally, Meals on Wheels began operating their congregate dining rooms program which seeks to increase socialization and consequentially the well-being of the elderly in Wake County.

1990s

Rapid growth characterized Meals on Wheels of Wake County through the next decade. In 1991, the one-millionth meal was delivered by longtime volunteer James Allen and just five years later, he would deliver the two-millionth meal in 1996. Having only ever relocated on church property from the basement at Hillyer to the house on Jones Street, in 1999, Meals on Wheels of Wake County had an urgent need to expand its capacity. They hoped to find a new space for offices and an on-site kitchen to use in preparing meals. In order to utilize community resources wisely, Meals on Wheels formed a collaboration with the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle and called it Food Runners, Inc. This partnership would allow for a shared kitchen and office space that increased accessibility for both organizations while they fulfill their respective missions.



1 millionth meal delivery by James Allen



The 2004 opening and dedication of the Vernon Malone Center

In the fall of 2001, Meals on Wheels began the frozen meal program to better serve those who live in the outlying areas of the county where there are no pickup sites or volunteers available.

In 2004, Vivien Keyes ended her tenure as executive director and Cathy Ulicney took on that role until 2006. Additionally, in November of 2004, the Vernon Malone Center was dedicated and Meals on Wheels of Wake County left the church at Hillyer for their present location. On March 1, 2005, the first meals were prepared in the new kitchen and delivered to 745 clients. To this day, Food Runners serves as the landlord and vendor of prepared senior meals at 1001 Blair Drive. In 2006, the current Executive Director Alan Winstead started providing leadership to the staff.

2000s

2010s

Meals on Wheels celebrated its 40th Anniversary in 2014, noting its appreciation to the community as a source for the organization's success. Shortly thereafter, the ServTracker Mobile Meals app was introduced to allow easier access to information on delivery status and mobile navigation in 2018. Technology was an important initiative for the organization throughout the decade, which would be a valuable investment in the coming years.

Meals on Wheels was no exception to the challenges the pandemic brought on. Learning how to serve elderly clients in the face of a national health crisis was something that gave the staff confidence as they adapted to and tackled their greatest challenge yet. The staff decided to transition from a daily hot meal delivery program to a once-a-week delivery of seven frozen meals. Along with distributing personal protective equipment, masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer, Meals on Wheels helped spotlight isolated senior adults in the area and saw an increase in awareness. Even the pandemic could not slow the organization down as they saw 302 new clients added and a 10% increase in meals served at the height of the crisis.

2020



Frozen meals being picked up for delivery in the midst of COVID-19

2021



On November 1, all clients received a delivered, hot meal for the first time since the pandemic. Additionally, all congregate dining spaces, now known as Friendship Cafes, were re-opened to provide a lunch, a take-home meal, and a safe space for socialization. Friendship Cafes all over the county were a priority during this time. Meals on Wheels began opening new sites and installing kiosks to allow seniors to digitally check in and reserve meals. This along with the streamlined app, made information easier to manage for the staff to better serve their clients. Because mental and physical well-being is a priority, Meals on Wheels has grown this initiative to 10 cafes today and is currently working toward opening their 11th site.

Meals on Wheels of Wake County, along with the entire country, will face new challenges. Even as the organization surpasses the astounding number of 11,000,000 meals being delivered, the work is not done. 8 out of 10 low-income, food-insecure seniors are not receiving the home-delivered or congregate meals they need nationwide. Looking ahead, Meals on Wheels is preparing for the 85+ population in our county to double in the next 20 years and by 2060, 1 in 3 Americans are projected to be 60 and older. Additionally, more diverse seniors are calling Wake County home, and Meals on Wheels is taking steps every day to figure out how to serve a more diverse population today and in the near future.

2024

and beyond

So, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Meals on Wheels of Wake County and their successes of the past. Going forward Meals on Wheels will use the same values established in 1974 of nourishing, enriching, and strengthening the lives of Wake County senior neighbors through a nutritious hot meal, check-in visits, and human connections. Together, they will provide fully nourished lives, life-giving connections, and much greater well-being for every senior in Wake County for another 50 years.

