



MEALS on WHEELS
SOUTHWEST OH & NORTHERN KY

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Friends at the Door

May 2026

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May is Older Americans Month

Led by the Administration for Community Living, Older Americans Month gives us a special opportunity to reflect on and appreciate older Americans' impact on our communities, culture and society. We believe it is our role at Meals on Wheels of Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky to provide support to the generation that raised so many of us. That starts with recognizing their impact and responding to their needs.

The individuals we serve come from many different backgrounds. They were born here in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, raised abroad and have called cities across the U.S. home. They are veterans of the Armed Forces, educators, transportation drivers, healthcare workers, artists and storytellers, small business owners and corporate professionals, chefs, machinists and more. They are members of civic organizations, volunteer with their church, participate in community projects, commit to lifelong learning and raise children and grandchildren.

Our region is shaped by—and made better because of—the lives, minds, talents and contributions of older generations. It is Meals on Wheels' privilege to be there for them in this well-earned chapter of life.



Dear Friends,

Happy spring! I hope this note finds you and your families well.

Meals on Wheels' mission is to deliver essential services that promote the independence and well-being of seniors. Please note, and this may surprise you, there is nothing about meals in our mission. Yes, providing meals happens to be the largest essential service we provide (nearly 1.2 million meals in 2025), but **we are "much more than a meal."**

Do you know Meals on Wheels has a transportation department to help seniors get to their doctors' appointments, the grocery store or to a senior center? Meals on Wheels also operates the Over-the-Rhine Senior Center in partnership with the City of Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Metro Housing Authority. We have a Social Connections Program featuring Friendly Calling, Digital Connect and Health & Wellness Programming. We even help seniors take care of their pets through our Pet Services Program. Finally, we offer Social and Protective Services which encompasses benefit management, full financial case management, independent living assistance and, in severe cases, a guardianship program.

The delivery of meals creates the all-important opportunity for our staff to conduct a welfare check on the seniors they serve. Through this relationship, our team can assist seniors and begin identifying what additional services could potentially benefit them to improve their quality of life.

As you can imagine, providing all these essential services takes resources—and the expense for providing these services continues to escalate significantly. Consider we have to regularly gas up 54 vehicles in our fleet, and we certainly buy a great deal of food, for examples. The great majority of our government funding is flat and, in some cases, decreasing. **It is worth sharing, too, that of all the philanthropic donations made across the U.S., only one percent goes to organizations serving seniors.**

As a society, we need to decide if helping take care of seniors is a priority. Think of your own loved ones. What if they did not have the necessary resources to age in place safely and with dignity?

So this is your opportunity. I ask you to support Meals on Wheels in any way you can. We like to think we can provide an opportunity for anyone to get involved who wants to help support seniors. Please visit muchmorethanameal.org for more information. We hope to connect with you soon.

Thanks for helping make our work possible!



**Mike Dunn, CEO of Meals on Wheels
of Southwest OH & Northern KY**



Ways to Give

Your generous gift makes it possible for us to reach a growing community of seniors who want to age in place with dignity. Meals on Wheels makes it easy for you to give with confidence and flexibility. You can make a gift through our secure online portal at muchmorethanameal.org/ways-give. Scan the QR code to go directly to our giving webpage.



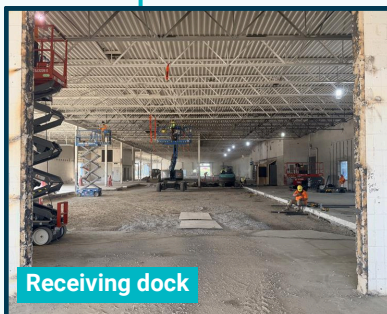
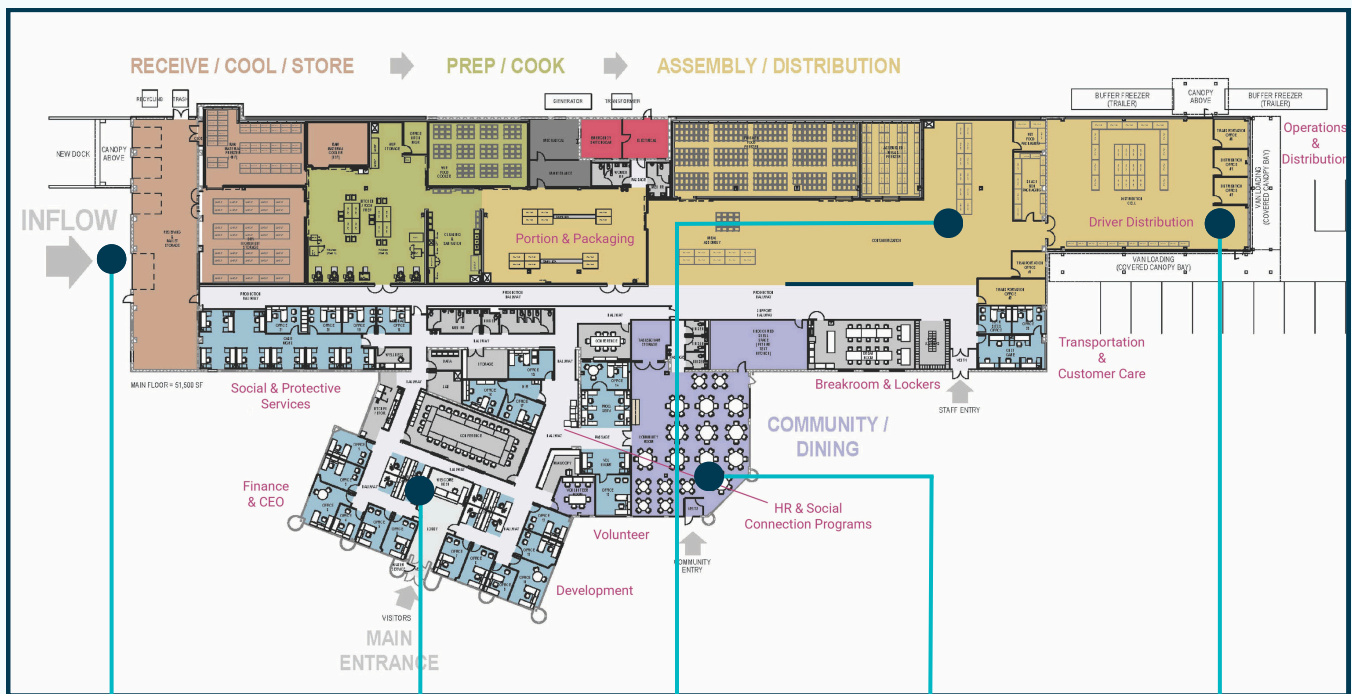
Nearing the Future of Meals on Wheels

Construction is well underway on Meals on Wheels of Southwest Ohio & Northern Kentucky's new headquarters and meals production center. This project transforms the former John Nolan Ford dealership in Columbia Twp. into a 51,500-square-foot facility designed to better serve our growing population of seniors.

Right now, we're preparing more than 1.2 million meals each year in a kitchen originally built to produce a fraction of that. This new space will allow us to dramatically expand our impact—scaling up to as many as 3 million meals annually and reaching up to 30,000 seniors each year. It will also bring our programs together under one roof, helping us operate more efficiently while expanding critical services.

With construction led by Danis Construction now fully underway, early phases like demolition are complete, and the space will begin to take shape in the months ahead as the kitchen, distribution areas and program spaces come to life. We remain on track to begin moving into the building around the end of the year, with full operations launching in early 2027.

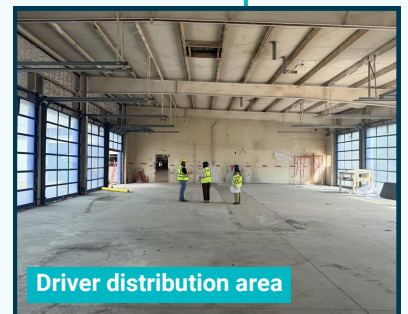
We're incredibly grateful for the community support that is making this possible. For updates about construction progress throughout the year, be sure to follow along at our website at muchmorethanameal.org and our social media channels on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram!



Receiving dock



Meals production center



Driver distribution area



Administrative offices



Community room

Fueling Seniors' Independence and Well-Being



TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

For seniors, transportation means more than just a ride. It is an invaluable tool for independence. That's especially true for seniors who live alone, no longer drive or experience mobility challenges. As one senior, Laurel, describes, "You kind of become a little kid again. You can't go anywhere unless someone takes you."

Independence is essential to our health and well-being as we age. That's why Meals on Wheels provides group and individual transportation services. We help make it possible for seniors to go to the grocery store, attend meals and social activities at area senior centers, attend doctor's appointments and receive medical treatment.

Services are uniquely designed to support a variety of seniors' needs. A full-time dispatch team manages calls and logistics, arranging routes and tracking vehicles on the road in real time. Drivers are trained to provide door-through-door service with physical assistance, use specialized lift features on vehicles for seniors with wheelchairs and walkers and provide other accommodations that prioritize safety and ensure comfort. One-hundred percent of the transportation fleet is wheelchair accessible and includes 12 buses and six minivans.

Mary, a transportation client, has benefitted from these services for the past year. She takes group trips with other seniors in her apartment building to

Kroger and says she appreciates the way Meals on Wheels offers an alternative manner of transport. She has had difficulties relying on cab services, citing a time when the driver left shortly after arriving outside her residence because she didn't get through the entrance quickly enough.

Mary adds, "Catching a bus, you're with four or five different kinds of people. With Meals on Wheels, you're only with people in your age bracket. You all can communicate together and nobody's looking down their nose because I've got the wheelchair or I'm walking with a cane."

Mary also receives individual transportation service to and from medical appointments. She sees seven doctors regularly, and Meals on Wheels ensures she can see her cardiologist, nephrologist and sleep analysis specialist—what she calls "the biggies."

She says the medical transit service allows her to attend appointments without straining her friends' and family's schedules. "Most of the seniors do not drive. My son works and cannot just be taking off. My sister works at the school with children. **So, we need the medical van. I think it's a Godsend.**"

To learn more about Meals on Wheels' transportation services, visit muchmorethanameal.org.



Transportation at a Glance



Number of trips made in 2025: 43,848

Average number of clients served daily: 92



Drivers are specially trained to assist clients with mobility challenges—a safe, reliable alternative to public transit and ride apps



Medical transit destinations: doctor's appointments, medical treatment, preventive care, chemotherapy, dialysis



Meet Laura Allen, Ph.D., Meals on Wheels' New Director of Development

Meals on Wheels is pleased to welcome Dr. Laura Allen to our organization! Dr. Allen recently completed research as Project Director of the Kenton County *Aging Readiness Plan*. She serves as an adjunct faculty member at the Erickson School of Aging Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where she is also affiliate faculty for the Doctoral Program in Gerontology. She completed her Ph.D. in Integrated Social Sciences at Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

Dr. Allen joins a team of development and marketing professionals under the direction of Chief Advancement Officer Justin Beale.

“Our community has already benefitted from Dr. Allen’s work in the field of aging. As one of the leading senior service providers in the region, Meals on Wheels is lucky to have Dr. Allen guiding our development efforts and cultivating a culture of philanthropy,” says Beale.

Learn more about Dr. Allen in this feature Q&A.



You were born and raised in Kenton County. How did that influence your work in the field of aging studies?

My Nana was a really important person in my childhood. I spent every summer break at her house in Dry Ridge and we got into all kinds of things—cooking, sewing, fishing, mowing, playing cards with her two sisters, driving to McDonald’s just for a hot fudge sundae. I watched her really enjoy her retirement, and I also saw how difficult it was to find caregiving locally when she started to have some care needs. Spending so much time with her and her friends sparked my passion for working with older adults, and it wasn’t until I got to college at Western Kentucky University that I learned there was a name for that: gerontology.

What made you choose Meals on Wheels of Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky?

This organization is growing, and it is rising to meet the moment. Throughout my research for the Kenton County *Aging Readiness Plan*, Meals on Wheels consistently stood out as a leader in service delivery and food access in the region. One of the most important things I learned in my last position was the economic impact of aging services like Meals on Wheels. **Supporting older adults to stay at home for longer not only serves the individual client, but it creates a ripple effect across our entire community**—from reducing the strain on our healthcare system to the neighborhoods, organizations and local businesses that benefit when older adults remain active, independent participants.

I saw the work of this organization is truly much more than a meal through the social connections programming, wellness checks, transportation and protective services, pet program, and more. When this opportunity opened up, I thought, *I want to be a part of that team*. And lucky for me, they invited me to join! Every day since, I have been filled with gratitude for the chance to work with and learn from such incredible colleagues.

What motivates you to support our organization’s mission and play an integral part in its growth?

The mission is clear: to deliver essential services that promote the independence and well-being of seniors. **Each person at Meals on Wheels is committed to the mission during a time when funding for meals and services for older adults is not guaranteed.** In just the first few weeks, I have heard from several clients about the joy-filled and stabilizing impact of our services. I feel so fortunate that working here allows me to work towards my own personal mission which is to be a good neighbor and to make life a little easier for the older adults in my community every day.

Get connected! Contact Dr. Laura Allen at lallen@muchmorethanameal.org



Finding Wellness Through Artistic Expression

"I very much look forward to the days when I can tell everybody I got art this week," says Mary, a member of the inaugural Meals on Wheels Senior Artist Cohort.

At 62, she never thought she would be learning how to paint or how to decoupage, especially as a self-described left-brained person. Yet, she is still only 62, and there is plenty of lifelong learning left to explore.

All too often, she says, "people just sit around and that's what they do. I'm trying to get out of that. And as far as art, I don't think it ever hurts to expand the parts of your brain that you don't use very often."

The Senior Artist Cohort is the first of its kind for Meals on Wheels' Social Connection Programs, created by Health & Wellness Program Coordinator Kara Harper. It is a partnership with the Cincinnati Art Museum (who provides educational support and resources) and ArtWorks (who has hosted monthly studio sessions).

Harper says, "This cohort was designed to empower older adults to view art and storytelling as means of personal wellness and social connection. We wanted to provide an encouraging, creative space that gives them permission to try something new and inspires them to think about their lives and journeys in meaningful ways."

Once a month, Meals on Wheels provided group transportation and served lunch at studio sessions, where Cincinnati-based teaching artist Annie Ruth provided mindful, thematic lessons through art.

"Many participants revisited formative memories, using art as a pathway to reconnect with identity and personal history," says Ruth. "For some, this included processing deeply emotional experiences. Moments like these often led to organic community support, as fellow residents offered comfort and presence. These interactions highlighted the role of art not only as a creative outlet, but as a tool for emotional healing and connection."

All skill levels were encouraged to join the program, emphasizing the value of art-making as a tool for well-being and opportunity for continuous learning. Newcomers and seasoned artists alike participated.

Mike, another member of the Cohort, considers himself one of the newcomers. He grew up in Cincinnati's Lincoln Heights where, he says, lifelong learning took root. "I wouldn't trade that upbringing for anything. I was surrounded by great mentors, great people."

One of the projects Mike has created in studio includes a model replica of a 1957 Chevy Bel-Air, his parents' first car. Another project includes a model ship, representing his son who is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy. The process has reconnected him with some of his most significant memories and favorite hobbies from earlier in his life. Building model cars was a hobby he enjoyed from childhood into adulthood—including a trying period when he became a caregiver to his mother. He put the hobby on the shelf in 2013 and did not engage with it again until the start of the Senior Artist Cohort.

He says, "That hobby really helped me through nine years of deep caregiving, and now here I am doing it again and it feels so great."

Mike says his experience with the Senior Artist Cohort has spurred the creation of a new artist "society" in the building where he lives. He and his neighbors are organizing a series of guided lessons modeled after the environment Ruth created in the studio sessions.

Says Ruth, "This experience reaffirmed a core belief: Art is a powerful vehicle for breaking down barriers, building bridges and empowering individuals and communities. When access is aligned with place, impact deepens—and sustainability becomes possible."

You are invited!

*The Senior Artist Cohort culminates in an exhibition of works completed by artists during studio sessions. **The gallery will be on view for one day only on Friday, May 29, in the Marek Family Commons of the Cincinnati Art Museum. A reception will be held 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.***

SNAPSHOTS

Reds Opening Day at OTR Senior Center



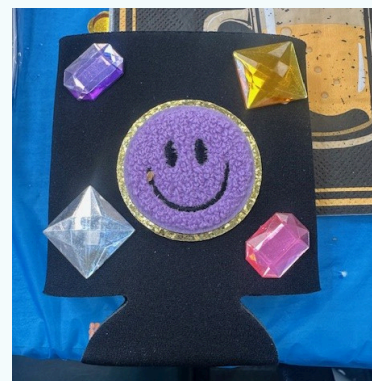
The OTR Senior Center, managed by Meals on Wheels, had their first Reds Opening Day celebration in their new home at Logan Commons. Located next to Findlay Market, the center enjoyed a festive day of ballpark bites, games, trivia, prizes and watching the parade just footsteps from all the action.

Spring Break Beach Party at Anderson Township Senior Center



The Anderson Township Senior Center threw a stay-cation party for their members. As a congregate partner, Meals on Wheels provided the lunch—the senior center provided the shark, karaoke, live music and more!

Sam Adams Volunteer Day at OTR Senior Center



Our neighbors, Samuel Adams Taproom, treated the OTR Senior Center to a special tasting day, featuring two of their non-alcoholic brews. Seniors learned about Sam Adams history and the culture of craft beer, and had a chance to decorate their own beer koozies.



Thank you, sponsors!

Your support made it possible for us to raise nearly \$260,000 at the 2026 Meals Madness Gala in March, with proceeds benefitting the Meals on Wheels mission.

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