

## Taking Care of Seniors - One Meal at a Time

Before the COVID-19 pandemic even struck, food insecurity in the senior population was a real problem in America. The most recent report from Feeding America found that 7.3% of the senior population – or 5.3 million seniors – is food insecure.

The pandemic has only intensified the issue – making even a simple trip to the grocery store difficult or even impossible due to economic difficulties, fear of catching the virus or other hardships.

Now, more than ever, food assistance programs can be a lifeline for seniors in need. The OSF Peace Meal Program is one example of help available. OSF Peace Meal helps seniors improve their nutrition, sustain their independence and enhance their quality of life through meals, fellowship and a connection to other services they may need.

This March, OSF Peace Meal joins the Administration for Community Living and Senior Nutrition Service providers across the country to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the national Senior Nutrition Program. Through the program, OSF HealthCare provides nutritious meals five days a week for seniors age 60 and older.

“When we think about our population and our community we think about those who maybe can’t get out of their homes, or they lack socialization with others and Peace Meal is more than just a senior nutrition program. It’s an opportunity where our drivers and our Peace Meal team can reach out and make sure that they have all the resources they need,” said Erin Kennedy, the Peace Meal lead for OSF HealthCare.

June Warren has been getting Peace Meals for about a year and a half. The 84-year-old Mahomet resident says her daily meal is a lifeline, and the delivery is something she looks forward to each day.

“I just feel so blessed,” remarked Warren. “I feel so blessed that there is such a thing as Peace Meals, and I don’t have to buy the groceries and cook and clean up and all that has to go with it, because I wouldn’t be able to do it, and I wouldn’t be able to stay in my home if I didn’t have the help.”

Programs such as OSF Peace Meal were established to improve food security among older adults. U.S. Census figures for the seven counties OSF Peace Meal serves in east central Illinois indicate 97,305 people are 60 or older. Of those, 31% are 75 or older, 24% live alone, and 31% live in poverty.

“Sometimes we’re the only people that our clients see a day. And to make sure that we have the ability to check in on our clients and to make sure they have everything that they need is invaluable for us to make sure they are okay, but also for them, to feel like they are part of our family,” Kennedy explained.

OSF Peace Meal collaborates with a variety of organizations, transportation providers, home care agencies, food pantries and care centers on receiving and providing referrals to connect those in need to resources and services to help maintain their independence.

“I got to thinking about all the hands that go in to getting it here, from the time the soil is worked up, until seeds planted, people work it, pull the weeds out, deliver it, and all the preparation that goes on

beforehand, how many hands are involved in getting that meal to me. And I am so thankful,” said Warren.

And as for the food – Warren said she gives it two thumbs up.

“I was really surprised. It’s been very, very good. I am very well pleased with the Peace Meals. I particularly like my fried chicken.”

OSF Peace Meal is available in Champaign, DeWitt, Ford, Iroquois, McLean, Piatt and Livingston counties. These counties are all served by an OSF HealthCare hospital.

To participate in the Peace Meal Senior Nutrition Program, please call (309) 665-5900 or (833) 923-3905 (toll free) and a meal coordinator will assist in the process of getting started.