

In its continuing mission to serve with the greatest care and love, OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center has started a new program that will provide a free meal once a month to anyone who needs it. SmartMeals: Sharing Christ's Love through Food is a new program that provides healthy, budget-friendly meals to try at home.

The program is designed to fill a need that was exposed in the 2017 Health Needs Assessment for McLean County. The assessment identified obesity as a major issue in the community. According to Erin Kennedy, OSF St. Joseph Center for Healthy Lifestyles Manager, a major part of preventing obesity is nutrition education. The SmartMeals program is designed to provide that knowledge, along with a recipe and ingredients for a healthy meal.

"The SmartMeals program specifically brought together the combination of education awareness and the bringing healthier foods together," said Kennedy.

Each month a new healthy meal will be offered, while supplies last. The meal will be lower in fat and sodium, and higher in fiber. Meals will be appropriate for most individuals, including those with dietary restrictions due to diabetes, heart failure, obesity, or COPD, for example.

"Any time that we can care for our community whether they are patients, or just our community at large, is amazing. We think about what health care looks like, and it's just not medical care," explained Kennedy. "It's wellness. It's prevention. It's keeping people out of our hospitals because we are empowering them to make healthier choices."

The spark behind SmartMeals came from Kris Burke of Bloomington, who made a donation for the program in honor of her parents, the late Catherine Albert Fleming and Richard Albert. She says SmartMeals is a perfect reflection of her parents' legacies.

"I think they'd really be pleased, and my mom liked to cook and she liked to entertain, and she liked to make other people welcome and I think that this ongoing will be great," said Burke.

Meals can be replicated for \$7 or less, and have ingredients that are easily found and are simple to make. Anyone in the community can visit the SmartMeals once a month to pick up one healthy, budget-friendly meal to try at home at the Center for Healthy Lifestyles at OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center.

There are also plans to expand the SmartMeals program to Livingston County later this year in collaboration with OSF Saint James – John W. Albrecht Medical Center in Pontiac.