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Did you know that many local and national companies will match the donations their employees make to nonprofits? When you donate to Meals on Wheels Central Texas, **your impact could be doubled with matching gifts from your company!** Visit our website to search and see if your company has a matching gift policy. mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org/get-involved/matching-gifts

Host a donation drive at your workplace or community organization! Help Meals on Wheels Central Texas provide essential items for our senior neighbors. We are always in need of new microwaves, toiletry items like soap, toothpaste, electric can openers, and household items. To find a list of the items we accept, and to download a flyer, please visit: mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org/get-involved/in-kind-giving

Did you know you could give through your Individual Retirement Account to Meals on Wheels Central Texas? We recommend speaking to your financial advisor to learn how you can make a significant donation to a charity close to your heart. It's an easy and popular way to give back to your community!

Interested in learning more? Email us at: development@mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org

ADAM'S CORNER



Dear Friends,

During my decades of being involved with Meals on Wheels Central Texas—as a volunteer, board member and, now, as the CEO—I have often struggled with a simple way to convey the meaning of our “More Than a Meal” motto. Well, I could not do so any better than by sharing the stories in this newsletter.

First and foremost, MOWCTX is about providing a meal to hungry seniors in our community, and there would be no such meal without our very own beloved Chef Ruben featured in these pages. As the heart and soul of our kitchen for over two decades, Chef Ruben has supervised the preparation of more than 13 million meals for homebound seniors! Thanks to his leadership and superb cooking skills, MOWCTX has literally nourished the lives of thousands of our vulnerable senior neighbors. And, as our volunteers know so well, the “More Than” includes that human connection between volunteer and client, which we honor in our cover story about longtime MOWCTX volunteer James Hart and his client Jose Balli. It is heart-warming to read about their special relationship, built on

shared experiences as veterans and longtime Austinites. If you'd like to learn more about Mr. Balli and Mr. Hart, I encourage you to watch their video on the MOWCTX YouTube channel, accessible on our website.

And finally, the “More Than” in our motto includes much-needed programs beyond food that help the older adults we serve live independently and with dignity for as long as possible. We are so excited to share in these pages the story about our implementation of CAPABLE, a cutting-edge evidence-based intervention where eligible clients direct and work with a team of professionals—an occupational therapist, a registered nurse and a handy-worker—to live more safely and independently in their own homes. At this time, 13 clients have graduated from this program, with 26 more clients still enrolled, and we're pleased to share some of their testimonials about the life-changing impact of even small modifications to their homes made under this intervention.

On behalf of all of us at MOWCTX, we are grateful for your loyal and generous support that continues to enable us to truly achieve our “More Than a Meal” mission to nourish and enrich the lives of seniors in need through programs and services that promote dignity and independent living.

Yours in Service,


Adam I. Hauser
MOWCTX President/CEO

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“THEY’RE CONCERNED ABOUT MY SAFETY”

“They're friendly...and they're concerned about my safety,” says 80-year-old Jose Balli about the caring Meals on Wheels Central Texas volunteers who bring nutritious food and warm smiles to his East Austin home.

Preparing his own meals is a challenge due to his limited mobility. “I can't be on my feet for too long, especially if I'm cooking something on the stove. The main thing is being careful I don't fall, which I have on some occasions,” he says. The meal deliveries ensure he gets the nutrition he needs. But to Mr. Balli, human interaction is just as important as healthy food. He doesn't get many visitors so he looks forward

to seeing MOWCTX volunteers at his door: “I really appreciate their work and I enjoy talking to them. I love the way they operate, you know, friendly and respectful.”

He especially enjoys spending time with longtime MOWCTX volunteer James Hart, who has delivered meals for 20 years. “I had elderly parents and towards the end of their lives, they didn't have a lot of visitors. I realized that just stopping by and saying a few words to these clients really brightens up their whole day and that to me was important,” Mr. Hart explains. “To see the smile on their face—it's one of those things that just keeps on giving. These

people become part of my family. They make my life richer and I think I do the same thing for them.”

Perhaps it was inevitable that he and Mr. Balli would hit it off. After all, the two share a few things in common: both served in the military—Mr. Balli in the U.S. Army and Mr. Hart in the U.S. Marine Corps. And both are longtime Austinites who enjoy reminiscing about the city's past. That kind of personal connection means the world to Mr. Balli: “We both remember what Austin was like back then. That connects me with him just as if he were a neighbor.”

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Newsletter of Meals On Wheels Central Texas



THANKS THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS AND COMPANIES FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR MISSION

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"IT'S A LABOR OF LOVE"

"My first job was at a place called CJ's Truck Stop in Texarkana, Texas. I said I wanted to be a cook and they laughed at me. Then about a week later, one of the cooks came to me and said 'do you really want to cook' and I said 'sure'. It took off from there."

Nearly 40 years later, no one is laughing at Ruben Burnett's culinary skills. Chef Ruben, as he is affectionately known, has supervised cooking operations at Meals on Wheels Central Texas since 2001. And since then, he and his team have prepared roughly 13 million meals for hungry homebound seniors in our community. Asked how he feels about achieving that kind of output, he says "tired," laughs, then adds "actually no, I think it's an accomplishment."

Austin was a much different place when Chef Ruben cooked his first meal for MOWCTX in 2001. The city was smaller and so was the demand for our life-sustaining services. Fast forward 20 years and the number of elders who need our help has sky-rocketed. MOWCTX provides Chef Ruben and his team with the tools they need to efficiently meet that increase. At the same time, Chef Ruben makes sure that, as the numbers grow larger, the quality of the food doesn't diminish. "The only thing different is we needed new equipment in order to reach our goals," he says of then and now.

There's no doubt his early stint as a short order cook trained him well for the fast-paced nature of his work at MOWCTX—preparing thousands of meals for homebound seniors per day. But his time spent in culinary school, and a variety of commercial kitchens, also taught him the art of cooking. This is helpful now because Chef Ruben's job comes with an added degree of difficulty that most of his culinary counterparts don't face. Besides making every meal that comes out of his kitchen taste good, he must also ensure it is full of nutrients. He knows his meals may be the only nutritious food our clients eat on any given day. He points to a new entree on the MOWCTX menu as an example of a dish that passes both the taste and the nutrition test: "It is coconut chicken, it is baked and has toasted coconut on it and a little bit of sweetness to it." Some clients have special dietary needs, and Chef Ruben and our in-house dietitians tailor meals to fit those requirements as well.

One of the biggest challeng-

es of Chef Ruben's long career came at the start of the pandemic, in early 2020, when he and his crew had to quickly pivot kitchen operations. To reduce the spread of COVID, clients now receive two weeks' worth of frozen and shelf-stable meals every other Friday. While daily meal service is on hiatus due to the pandemic, Chef Ruben starts his workday at 5 a.m.—three hours later than when he clocked in to prepare for daily meal delivery. He is looking forward to when it's safe to resume daily hot meal deliveries. "It's a labor of love when you have to get here at 2 o'clock to get started. The fact that we know that we're giving back to the community. Putting something that's in need in place," he says with a smile.



CAPABLE

Community Aging in Place: Advancing Better Living for Elders

As part of our "More Than a Meal" mission and holistic approach to caring for seniors in need, Meals on Wheels Central Texas has launched a new evidence-based pilot program for older adults in Central Texas, made possible through the generous support of the St. David's Foundation. CAPABLE, co-developed at the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, uses a multidisciplinary approach to help vulnerable seniors age safely in their homes. The team consists of the client and three professionals: an occupational therapist (OT), a registered nurse (RN), and a handyworker. Together, the CAPABLE team addresses the home environment and builds on the client's own strengths to improve safety and independence. The program's client-directed approach allows seniors to define the meaningful daily activities they want to achieve, as shared in the stories below.

Throughout the five-month period of this program, each participant enrolled in CAPABLE will interact with an OT from our partners at WellMed, a MOWCTX RN and a handyworker.

CAPABLE studies have demonstrated:

- A 50% reduction in the number of Activities of Daily Living (such as bathing, navigating stairs, preparing meals) that were previously difficult for the client.
- A tripling in the percentage of people who reported no difficulty with walking.
- A 50% increase in the number of clients who said they had no difficulty in self-care.
- A clinically significant decrease in depressive symptoms.
- A 50% decrease in hazards within the home.
- A reduction in both hospitalizations and nursing home admission rates.
- The functional improvements experienced by CAPABLE participants were observed across all demographics and disease groups.

CAPABLE is currently in its pilot phase at MOWCTX, and at this time, the maximum number of eligible participants have already been enrolled.

For any questions about this program, please contact Stephanie Houghton-Bowman, RN and CAPABLE Program Manager, at shoughtonbowman@mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org



CAPABLE Client Stories

Sharon L., 73 years old, was one of the very first clients of the CAPABLE program. She lives in an upstairs apartment and has experienced several falls going up and down the stairs. She worked with her OT on her overall mobility, such as moving up and down the stairs with more ease and getting in and out of the car safely. Additionally, the CAPABLE handyworker installed new stair railings to enhance safety. These combined improvements allow her to leave her apartment more frequently. The CAPABLE team also made adjustments to her bathroom and living room—decluttering the space to reduce fall risk—and installing a grab bar in the bathroom and a railing in her hallway. Sharon worked with the CAPABLE nurse and OT to improve her strength and balance, increase communication with her medical providers, and improve her overall mood and sense of wellbeing. Although Sharon struggles with chronic pain and multiple health challenges, her positive attitude and willingness to improve made her the perfect CAPABLE participant. The program helped improve the overall safety of her environment, thereby decreasing the risk of adverse events such as falling down the stairs.

Daniel P. is a 90 year old client who came to us with the goal of spending more time out of his wheelchair. He had back surgery last year and has been primarily wheelchair-bound since. He also wanted to start driving again and have better wheelchair access to his bathroom. Inside his home, the CAPABLE team installed rails in the hallway and special hinges on his bathroom door to give him easier access both with and without his wheelchair. CAPABLE also provided a car cushion and a car cane so he can get in and out of his car more easily. Daniel partnered with the OT to increase his mobility, using a stationary bike provided by the CAPABLE program. In addition, he worked with the CAPABLE nurse to advocate better for himself with his medical providers, and he was able to eliminate his need for insulin. Throughout the process, Daniel embraced the challenge and was an excellent CAPABLE participant because of his willingness to engage in the problem solving process and incorporate new health promotion strategies to improve his overall health and wellbeing.