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Tribune ride-along with Meals on Wheels

by Taylor Pardue
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Meals on Wheels provides around 14 seniors with meals in Jonesville and another eight in Elkin, with an additional Elkin resident on the wait list. Jonesville's Yadkin Valley Senior Center allowed the Tribune to ride along on a meal route to see what goes in to the program at the ground level.

As a volunteer for the Jonesville Yadkin Valley Senior Center, Terri Silipigni started her normal Meals on Wheels route by packing meals for the elderly into a heat-saving transport bag. She put each tray of chicken casserole, cauliflower, broccoli, a slice of bread, and milk into containers then filled the back seat of her Mercury for the roughly hour and a half ride.

Silipigni delivers nutrition for seniors through Meals on Wheels, a program that delivers meals to individuals at home who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals. Because they are housebound, many of the recipients are the elderly. Volunteers drive their vehicles to deliver meals and help those who cannot come to the center to pick up their own meals.

Currently, the program is servicing 14 seniors in Jonesville and eight seniors in Elkin.

One by one Silipigni began delivering meals in Jonesville. She stopped at different houses and walked to the front door where she was welcomed by the various seniors. She smiled and talked to the seniors like the oldest of friends.

“Many of the seniors *are* long time friends,” said Silipigni.

Silipigni has been running the route for two years since she covered for her mother, also a meal deliverer, and found out how much she liked the experience. Every Wednesday and Friday she delivers the meals.

Now a seasoned veteran of her route, Silipigni does not even need to look at the list of names she is given to deliver to. She drives from house to house delivering the meals and chatting with the seniors. She knows the regulars on a first name basis and tries to check on how each of them is doing when she visits.

Silipigni delivered both Wednesday's lunch and two more - Meals on Wheels does not run on July 4 or 5, so the program brings extra meals to cover the next two days.

For some residents needing services, Silipigni puts the meals on their dining room tables. For others who are not ready to eat she places the trays in the refrigerator, making sure the meals are taken care of.

After the meal is delivered, Silipigni talks to the seniors for a few minutes each. Many of them also had pets that Silipigni knew by name.

"I realize that for some of these people, I am the only person they see during the day," said Silipigni.

Silipigni gave out hugs and well wishes for the upcoming July 4 holiday and weekend then drove to the next house.

"Sometimes, it's harder to get through the day," said Silipigni. "If the senior is really having a tough time, I'm going to spend a little extra time with them to help, hopefully, cheer them up."

According to Silipigni, she has even saved a life recently of a person who was home but had suffered a life threatening injury. She knocked on the door and got no answer - something unusual considering most of the seniors expect Silipigni like clockwork and wonder where she is if she is a few minutes late.

Silipigni reported to her office that the senior was not answering the door.

Maxine Macemore, a nutrition site director, said the family was very grateful for the help.

"She is so appreciative, the family is, of what we do. It's not just the meals, it's the seeing if they're ok," Macemore said. "If they don't answer the door we make sure we follow up and call them back or either then we call the contact person and make sure they are ok. It's not just the meals, I think they just enjoy the friendship and talking and stuff."

"I enjoy seeing them, being around them," Silipigni said. "Sometimes I get their life stories, which are very interesting and overwhelming. Their trials and their tribulations. I give them a comfort: a ear for them to talk to, a shoulder to lean against, a hug or a comforting word. Just to say 'things will turn around,' or 'I hope you have a great day' with a smile on your face. I just love being around them."

Susan Martin was one of the recipients of a meal. She told the Tribune "Not only do they bring you your food, and it's all nice - hot when it's supposed to be hot, cold when it's supposed to be cold - but they offer you comfort and friendship and talk to you and see that you're alright."

To contact Taylor Pardue call 336-835-1513 ext. 15, or email him at tpardue@civitasmedia.com.