

## **The History of Mobile Meals of Toledo, Inc.**

(Adapted from an article by Carolea Heintz, one of the Founders of our agency.)

In early spring of 1967, the initial steering committee of Mobile Meals held their first meeting. A task force was formed with committees to iron out the issues of food service, packaging and delivery, budget and finance, promotion and publicity, screening and eligibility, and coordination. By the time this arduous job was finished, the committee had secured the official sponsorship of the Auxiliary to the Academy of Medicine and obtained, not only the blessing from local physicians, but also a rent-free office in the Academy of Medicine Building and free 24-hour phone service from their switchboard. They also had established a liaison with the Health Department, Sanitary Engineers, Police Department, Visiting Nurse Service and the City Nutritionists. St. Luke's Hospital graciously agreed to prepare our first meals for delivery and they continue to prepare some of our meals today].

With research completed, and health and welfare agencies ready and willing, a volunteer corps of 30 women [mostly wives of physicians and dentists] were recruited. St. Luke's Hospital was prepared to do the meals. Mobile Meals of Toledo began its service on December 4, 1967. Four clients were referred for meal service. The day before service was to commence, however, two clients canceled. We had to improvise two clients for meal delivery because the media and television cameras were ready and focused on covering our "first day" of service. Following the uncertainty of that first day, news traveled fast about this innovative meal service. Before our six-month trial period was over, the Mobile Meals Pilot Project had expanded to Mercy Hospital. Demand for our service was increasing and our program again expanded to St. Charles, Riverside, St. Vincent's, Toledo, Parkview, MCO, and Flower Hospitals and also to the Lutheran Home and the Toledo Mental Health Center. As the clients increased, so did the volunteer corps, from thirty women to over 500 [including a few men] in a very short time.

The official purpose of our service was: The provision of palatable meals that supply essential nutrients to a person who is unable to prepare or obtain adequate meals during a period of need or to someone who is unable to fully understand and prepare a modified diet. This service is for all who would benefit from it regardless of income, with emphasis on the aged.

Meals were packaged in Styrofoam coolers and delivered Monday through Friday by volunteer teams of 2 people. Meals were delivered to clients and the coolers were returned to the food bases to be readied for the next day's delivery. Thursday's volunteers delivered a weekly bill, while Friday volunteers collected

the money from the clients and took it to the Mobile Meals Office. Today, billing is computerized and done on a monthly basis.

After three years in operation 74,730 meals were served to 550 clients. Approximately half of the meals were modified diets. A choice of five modified diets was available. The cost of the meals through the first ten years was \$2.10 per day or \$2.35 for modified diets. Today with inflation, our meal charge is \$9.30 per day. The clients' bills were adjusted, as they are today, according to their income. All clients are asked to pay at least a small amount. In 2006, we served over 501,000 meals to 1,088 clients. More than half the meals were modified diets and we had 13 modified diets available.

The initial task force committees concerned themselves with the needs of clients. Financial concerns seemed to take care of themselves. The proverbial "shoe string" launched Mobile Meals and kept it in operation during those early years. Although Mobile Meals had no money, we did have a fervent desire to provide food for those in need. Our treasury was started when we sold leftover cookies from a meeting of the steering committee. \$8.15 was made – our first fundraiser! With donated office space, phone service and wonderful volunteer office workers, money from service clubs, the Northwest Ohio Heart Association, The Medical Auxiliary and many generous individuals, we kept Mobile Meals alive.

For additional funding, the Greater Toledo Community Chest [United Way] was contacted. In 1969, funding was approved and we were allocated \$9,000. We were ecstatic! Today, we continue our association with United Way as one of the team of member agencies. By our association with United Way, we have received recognition as a tremendous asset to the community. "Man-made" islands really do exist and Mobile Meals helps to break down the isolation that many clients may feel.

By 1972, Mobile Meals had serviced 845 clients, expanded to nine different hospital bases and had serviced more than 133 clients daily [five days a week]. During those years, experiences have been wide and varied. Our volunteers have found some clients deceased. Two volunteers chased a wild bird that had flown into one client's home – and caught it! Volunteers knocked down a storm door to enter the home where a client was on the floor. She had fallen during the night. Volunteers also have found a client semi-conscious from a faulty gas stove. For some clients, Mobile Meals is the only contact with the outside world and they depend upon Mobile Meals and our volunteers to check on them daily.

Throughout our 40 years, we have served as a laboratory for people from one end of the country to the other, who have come to learn and observe our programs. In our own state, we have worked with Akron, Findlay, Bryan, Tiffin,

Bowling Green, Youngstown and Port Clinton. Some of these communities have set up their own meal programs. We have also visited other agencies to learn and observe, such as the program in Lansing, Michigan, San Francisco and in Oahu, Hawaii. Our founder attended the first national meeting of Home Delivered Meals in Washington D.C. In our fourth year of operation, we had an observer from Osaka, Japan. After viewing our programs, he returned to Osaka and started a meal program, naming it “Mobile Meals of Toledo in Osaka”!

Throughout the years, Mobile Meals continues to provide life-sustaining nourishment for the body and love for the soul. As one of our long time clients said: “You make me happy to look forward to tomorrow. You’ve made Christmas become Christmas and even my birthdays have become special – bless you!”