

SPRING 2020

SO MUCH MORE THAN A MEAL ... OUR AMAZING SENIORS

Written by Carolann Welsch, MOWMC volunteer

This is the second in a series of occasional articles about the lives of the amazing seniors we are honored to serve. All of our seniors have a story to tell. We just need to take time to listen and learn.

Sam Hamod life's journey has been on a road less traveled. Born in 1936 in Gary Indiana, from a modest background, he has become an award-winning poet, with ten books of published poetry to his credit, and has taught at some of the most prestigious universities in the world.

Sam was born and raised in the industrial town of Gary to a Lebanese-Muslim immigrant father and a Lebanese-Muslim American mother from Iowa. His parents owned a boarding house just two blocks from the steel mills and one block from the railroad. For the first five years of his life, Sam and his parents lived in one room of that boarding house, with only a sink in the room. The men who lived in the boarding house were immigrants who worked in the steel mills and on the railroad. "Pol[es], Czechs, Slovaks, and Russians ... Almost all immigrants ... I got to hear a bunch of languages, music. So it was a good international education at an early age. I liked the guys and they liked me ... I would wake up every morning around 6 o'clock or so, because the trains would go by and rattle the window and wake me up. Then I would get dressed and go downstairs to eat breakfast with the guys."

When Sam's little brother was born, the family moved to a small house. His father then bought a bar in Gary, with an African-American clientele. Sam would go with his Mom to the bar every evening to bring his father dinner. "So from 6-12 years old, I was in the bar ... So, I got to hear blues and jazz and my Dad's waitresses taught me how to dance. I used to love it because we could eat hamburgers and drink Coca Cola and have potato chips and hear the music and dance. So, I would be there five nights a week, and sometimes six nights a week. So that was my life."

An excerpt from Sam's poem "Leaves"

Tonight, Sally and I are making stuffed grape leaves, we get out a package, it's drying out, I've been saving it in the freezer, it's one of the last things my father ever picked in this life – they're over five years old and up to now we just kept finding packages of them in the freezer, as if he were still picking them somewhere packing them carefully to send to us making sure they didn't break into pieces.



Dr. Sam Hamod,
Meals on Wheels Participant

Sam attended Northwestern University, where he was a marketing and communications major. He made many lifelong friends there, including the TV and movie writer, director, producer Gary Marshall (*Happy Days, Pretty Woman*). Sam knew nothing of literature until his girlfriend, who later became his wife, encouraged him to take a literature course. It was in that course that he discovered that he had a talent for writing short stories. He showed them to his professor, who encouraged him to continue.

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Meals on Wheels of Mercer County is a comprehensive nutrition program committed to providing nutritious meals and related services, which are designed to promote the independence, dignity, health and wellbeing of our homebound participants.

SO MUCH MORE THAN A MEAL... OUR AMAZING SENIORS

...CONTINUED FROM COVER PAGE

Sam didn't realize, though, that he could make a living writing, so he applied and was accepted at the prestigious University of Chicago Law School. After a successful first year, where he won the moot court competition, his father became ill and asked him to return home. In order to help his family, Sam dropped out of law school to run the family bar business. It was during this time that Sam started writing poetry.

After two years, Sam decided he didn't want to run a bar for the rest of his life. So, he left in order to pursue his education. He received a Master's Degree in Communications from Northwestern, taught at Western Carolina and Valparaiso Universities, and then went to the University of Iowa for his PhD in American Studies. It was at Iowa that he realized what he really wanted to do was write poetry. He told me: "Rilke, the famous German poet says, you don't chose to write poetry, poetry choses you. And that's what happened. I didn't chose, I swear to God. I just began writing and I began writing well from the first day. I don't know where it came from."

Fortunately, Sam didn't have far to look for a creative writing school; the world famous Iowa Writer's Workshop is at the University of Iowa. At first the Workshop rejected his application, but Sam showed his poetry to several famous poets who were teaching there, W.S. Merwin and Anslem Hollo, who were impressed with his work. Hollo said he would take Sam on as a student. After a year of studying at the Workshop Sam was asked to teach there. He eventually received his PhD.

Sam also taught at Princeton, Michigan, Howard, Pittsburgh and Wisconsin Universities. He taught internationally in Lebanon, Syria, Spain, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey. His first major book of poetry was published in 1969 while he was in Iowa: *Holding Action*. He has since published many books of poetry, including *Dying with the Wrong Name* (1980), which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize by Raymond Carver, the short story writer. More recently, Sam's 2006 book of poetry *Just Love Poems for You* was nominated for a second Pulitzer. Sam was also nominated for a Nobel Prize for literature by the Mexican writer, Carlos Fuentes. Fuentes said of Sam: "He is the inheritor of Lorca and Neruda, he has their sense of life, their energy, their sense of humanity and his vision is clear."



WHO YOU HELP



Mrs. Turner is one of our wonderful participants who has been getting meals delivered to her and her husband for three years. Mrs. Turner has lived in Mercer County since 1961, living in Trenton before moving to her current home in Ewing.

BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FACTS AND FIGURES FROM 2019

89%



SATISFACTION RATE

76.2



AVERAGE PARTICIPANT AGE

66%



OF PARTICIPANTS WERE SERVED FOR 6+ MONTHS

57%



SERVED LIVE ALONE

82,294



MEALS DELIVERED

6



CENTENNARIANS SERVED

64%



WOMEN

36%

MEN

40



PETS SERVED

PET PANTRY ROUND - UP



Meet Duchess, the newest participant of the Pet Pantry!



Pet Pantry Coordinator, Eli Byrnes, selling his homemade dog bandanas at a recent fundraiser

The Pet Pantry provides specialized pet food bags twice a month for our participants who have furry companions. If you would like to support the program, you can visit our website for a list of requested pet foods or to make a donation.

GOING GREEN

In an effort to be more environmentally friendly, in late 2019 MOWMC switched from single-use plastic bags for meal deliveries to reusable shopping bags. With over 250 deliveries each day, what seems like a small change will save an estimated 60,000 bags from going into the landfill (or worse!).

The reusable bags were generously donated by local supermarkets, including Whole Foods in Princeton and ShopRite of Ewing.

Memorial & In Honor Donations

IN MEMORY OF

Harold I. Abramson
By Robert Eisenstat

Anna C. Lombardo
By Jo Ann T. Lombardo

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By Peggy & Larry Goodman

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By Eugene Lowicki

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and
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William Wiegmann

Herbert Wewer

NJ INCOME TAX BILL

On December 16th, 2019, the NJ Assembly unanimously approved a bill previously approved by the NJ Senate, which would allow for a voluntary contribution of excess taxes through your NJ state income tax return to Meals on Wheels!

This indeed is very exciting news for MOW providers all over our state, as it can become a source of revenue we can put toward covering meal costs. Meals on Wheels America was chosen to administer the funds to NJ programs. Governor

Phil Murphy signed the legislation on January 15th, 2020, so please consider using your NJ State income tax form to make a contribution!





MEALS on WHEELS
MERCER COUNTY

NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #16
TRENTON, NJ

320 HOLLOWBROOK DRIVE
EWING, NJ 08638
(609) 695-3483
MealsOnWheelsMercer.org
info@mealsonwheelsmercer.org

Meals on Wheels of Mercer County is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.
All contributions are tax deductible.

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March for Meals

You eat out.



SCAN ME

They eat in.



March 1 – 31,
2020

For participating
locations, visit
mealsonwheelsmercer.org



A HEARTFELT THANK YOU!!

...to all of the generous individuals, civic groups, houses of worship, schools, corporations, foundations, and our tireless volunteers who support us all throughout the year!!

