



A Meals on Wheels of Mercer County Publication May 2026



## OLDER AMERICANS MONTH



CHAMPION YOUR HEALTH: MAY 2026

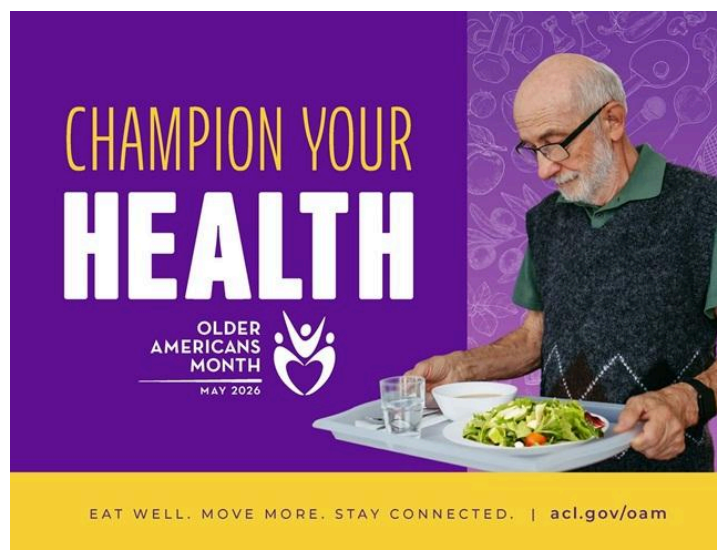
**Celebrated every May, Older Americans Month (OAM)** is led by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Established in 1963, OAM is a time to recognize older Americans' contributions, highlight aging trends, and reaffirm commitments to serving older adults in our communities.

This year's theme, **“Champion Your Health,”** focuses on prevention, wellness, and personal responsibility as cornerstones of healthy aging. It encourages older adults to take an active role in their health — advocating for themselves, accessing preventive care, and making informed decisions that support independence.

**At Meals on Wheels of Mercer County,** we provide therapeutic meals overseen by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, and social well-checks from volunteers to help individuals stay healthy and independent in their homes.

For more information, click the button to learn more.

[I want to learn more](#)



*Photo courtesy of the Administration for Community Living*

## Stories From Our Participants

### Meet Loretta!

"I get so much more than just the food," said Loretta, an 87-year-old participant with Meals on Wheels of Mercer County (MOWMC). Meals on Wheels is more than just a meal; it's about human connection.

Loretta is a jack of all trades; she's an actor, an educator, and an advocate. She is also independent by nature; it's she and her walker against the world. With her outgoing personality, she believes she can do anything she wants despite limitations with her mobility. Loretta insists there's always someone willing to help, including the volunteers at MOWMC.

Lynn, a regular volunteer in East Windsor whom Loretta calls an "angel," delivers meals twice a week. Like many other volunteers, Lynn never fails to ask if there's anything else she can do to help, and for Loretta it's a lifeline. The offer means a lot because it's genuine, and sometimes she takes her up on it.

Loretta doesn't take the volunteer visits for granted. In fact, they allow her to stay connected with her community from home.

"You don't realize that you can be in your house and not see or talk to anyone. You may talk on the phone and you may even use FaceTime, but there's nothing like human beings standing in your house or standing at your door."

Meeting volunteers like Early, a man with a full, long beard and colorful outfits, or even the Mayor of East Windsor, who stopped by to deliver her meal in March, is part of the Meals on Wheels experience.

Loretta combats loneliness every day, but there was a time she didn't have to think about it. Loretta often recalls her "sweetheart in heaven," her late husband, and how his passing was so abrupt. They've talked about death before, but "when it really kicks in, I promise you, you're not ready," she said.

Losing her husband was an unexpected change, but she slowly started adjusting to this new lifestyle. About two years later, the pandemic isolated everyone, including Loretta, who lost her church congregation and access to her friends on top of the loss of her love. Coupled with her mobility issues, it made it more difficult to get out of the house on her own.

"I'm blessed because I'm resourceful and I have good friends and Meals on Wheels is a part of what helps people go on," Loretta reflected.

She values her independence, and resources like Meals on Wheels help her maintain it. They help older adults like her stay independent. Loretta has the support and the will, and with that in her back pocket, there's nothing that she can't do.

"I'm single again. After 20 or 30 years of being a team; we were a couple. We did things together, we planned things, and thought about things and fought about things, but we were a team," she said. "When one of the team members leaves like that, the other one has to decide to stop or go ahead."

Luckily, Loretta chose to go ahead. For herself, for everyone who loves her, and her "sweetheart in heaven."



*Volunteer Wolf sporting his poncho at Rider University before his meal delivery*

## Welcome Our New Volunteers

*Each month, we're proud to highlight the newest members of our volunteer community.*

*In April, we welcomed:*

**Melissa A.**

**Nina C.**

**Thea Mary C.**

**Theresa R.**

**Dominic S.**

**I want to Volunteer!**



## ☀️ Summer Volunteers Needed! ☀️

This summer, consider volunteering for  
Meals on Wheels of Mercer County!

We are looking for dedicated individuals in our community  
to **deliver meals** with us.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more  
about how you can get involved, send an email to  
**[volunteer@mealsonwheelsmercer.org](mailto:volunteer@mealsonwheelsmercer.org)** or  
call **(609) 695-3483**.

---

### Participant Perspectives

Students from Rider University and The College of New Jersey gathered to assemble 400 Spring Bags for MOWMC participants. Each bag contained two different booklets, including a word search and an adult coloring book, as well as a set of colored pencils. In March, our volunteers distributed the Spring Activity Bags to our participants!

*Two/three weeks ago I received two books from Meals on Wheels. One was a word search book. The other book was an adult coloring book. Every day I complete a page of word search. When I have finished the word search I will start on the coloring book. I was surprised and delighted to get the books. Thank you so very much.*

*Joan D.*

*Handwritten note from MOWMC participant, Joan*

**"Two or three weeks ago, I received two books from Meals on Wheels. One was a word search book. The other was an adult coloring book. Every day I complete a page of the word search. When I finish the word search, I will start on the coloring book. I was surprised and delighted to get the books. Thank you very much."**

**~Joan**

---

### Meet our new Director of Volunteer Services

# Welcome to the team, Kiarra!

Kiarra is a mission-driven nonprofit professional who brings a thoughtful and people-centered approach to her work. With a Master's degree in Community Development from Northwest University, she is passionate about providing vulnerable communities with both practical and meaningful support.



*Kiarra Cottman*

At Meals on Wheels, Kiarra values being part of a mission that goes beyond providing meals to help foster dignity, independence, and a sense of belonging for seniors in our community. She is especially honored to work alongside a dedicated team of volunteers whose compassion and commitment make this impact possible each day.

## In the News...

### Meals on Wheels America Donation



*Photo courtesy of Meals on Wheels America*

You've probably heard that Meals on Wheels America recently received a \$70 million unrestricted gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. This gift reflects confidence in the Meals on Wheels network and the impact local providers such as us deliver every day in communities across the country.

#### *What does it mean for us?*

While local impact is part of Meals on Wheels America's multi-year approach, it is important to note that **Meals on Wheels of Mercer County operates independently and raises its own funds.** The generous national gift does not directly fund our local programs. The needs in our community remain

significant, and local support continues to be essential to ensuring we can serve every older adult who relies on us.

Read more about MacKenzie Scott's generous donation [HERE!](#)

## "Let's Talk" with MOWMC CEO, Venetta Ellerbe

### *A Radio Segment by WDVR*

On April 27th, MOWMC was proudly featured on WDVR's segment of "Let's Talk." It was a pleasure to have our CEO, Venetta Ellerbe, join host Andy Kin on air to talk about Meals on Wheels, the impact on Mercer County, and the growing need in our community.

Check out the recording below!

[Listen Now](#)



*CEO Venetta Ellerbe with radio host  
Andy Kin at WDVR station*

## TCNJ Bonner Students Highlighted!

The Bonner students at The College of New Jersey are passionate about community service, and Meals on Wheels of Mercer County of course! It's inspiring for the younger generation to stand up and show up for older adults in their community.

"It's not just food and security when you think of things like Meals on Wheels, it's actually addressing social isolation," Rayjohn Felicia, a Bonner coordinator at the College, said. "One of the things that I try to instill in my Bonners is having that open perspective of trying to understand issues, even though they're not always present. By interacting with the participants, just checking on their day or even having a full on five to ten minute conversation with them, it does make a difference in their own happiness."

Click [HERE](#) to read more!

## Bonner students help feed the elderly with Meals on Wheels

By Ryan Conway  
Correspondent

There are many non-profit organizations that focus on helping people facing food insecurity. One organization, Meals on Wheels, is focused on not only preparing meals, but delivering them to those who are unable to get to a grocery store.

The Meals on Wheels program is a nationwide organization that provides nutritious meals to community neighbors who experience challenges in accessing nutritious food and support. It has served approximately 244 million meals annually across the globe, and has a branch based in Mercer County.

In fall 2016, it partnered with the College's Bonner Scholars program. Students assisted in preparing and delivering meals to seniors, in collaboration with Rider's Bonner Scholars program.

Kennedy Pettiford, a senior psychology major, enrolled in Bonner when she was accepted into the College, and has volunteered with Meals on Wheels since her first semester at the college. As the current site leader, she believes that many students in the country don't understand how tough it is for some people, especially seniors who are limited in their mobility to get access to food.

"To get out and get your groceries is more of a privilege than people expect, because you need to be able to have a car,

you need to have money, you need to have public transportation, you need to have a support group or service to get you to the grocery store," Pettiford said.

The Meals on Wheels program also isn't just about feeding seniors any kind of food; they are focused on feeding them nutritious meals to keep the elderly community healthy.

"All of the meals are made with people's diets in mind, so when you're an older person, you might have diabetes, you might have high blood pressure," Pettiford said. "Some people may need more protein in their diet to help substitute for the lack of meals they are eating."

The setup in Mercer County is simple: Students at Rider University prepare the meals, while College students drop them to client's homes. Pettiford credited Rider's "amazing" kitchen for helping them put together so many meals.

As such, College volunteers are responsible for delivering food to those in need. However, it's not that simple. These are seniors, many of whom may live by themselves and may be physically disabled. For some of these recipients, seeing a Bonner drop off their meal is oftentimes the only social interaction they'll have throughout the day.

"It's not just food and security when you think of things like Meals on Wheels, it's actually addressing social isolation," Rayjohn Felicia, a Bonner coordinator at the

College, said. "One of the things that I try to instill in my Bonners is having that open perspective of trying to understand issues, even though they're not always present. By interacting with the participants, just checking on their day or even having a full on five to ten minute conversation with them, it does make a difference in their own happiness."

Preparing meals is one thing, but delivering it is a whole different story. The Meals on Wheels program had often struggled with finding delivery drivers, which made the Bonner's at the College such a huge helping hand. They have their work cut out for them too: the Mercer County branch has 27 routes to make and drop off food to Ewing, Trenton, Princeton and other parts of the county.

However, sometimes nature gets in the way and we saw that twice in the past two months. Two massive snowstorms hit New Jersey in January and February, which could have impeded the Meals on Wheels's task of delivering food to seniors. However, the program had procedures in place for these circumstances in the winter, and they came prepared.

"We do emergency food at certain parts of the season where we anticipate snowstorms."

Pettiford said. "We will get shelf stable meals that are typically put in the microwave and they are vegan friendly. We packed about 700 emergency meals [a few

summers ago due to rainstorms] that would have about a week's worth of food for each person of microwavable meals just to anticipate any inclement weather where we can't deliver, especially over the winter."

Sophomore and accounting major Syed Mohsin is one of these delivery drivers. He started volunteering for Meals on Wheels when he arrived his first semester at the College. He believes that the social aspect of Meals on Wheels makes it different from many Center for Community Engagement programs offered at the College.

"Every time I'm asked this question, the answer is the same: it's the consistency that Meals on Wheels offers," Mohsin said. "It's something unique to Meals on Wheels that isn't really there with a lot of other opportunities, which is that there needs to be people going out constantly and in turn, you can always be reliant on there being work to do and being able to go out there and do it."

The human facet of Meals on Wheels is what makes it distinct and unlike many other programs. For Pettiford, she believes in one trait that is key to delivering these meals: empathy.

"To connect with somebody you need to be very empathetic because you are dealing with a certain population of people that have experienced so much loss in their life, dealing with food insecurity, [and] isolation that it really matters to have a happy smile."

*Newspaper clipping of The Signal, TCNJ's student paper*



### We earned a 2026 Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency!

See what your donations help us accomplish [HERE](#). Use this link for unlimited access to our profile. Keeping our profile up to date helps us gather support; enabling funders and donors to find us and learn about our impact!

## Giving Info

[Donate Now](#)

***You Can Give Through Your Donor-Advised Fund!***

**Making a grant through your donor-advised fund is a simple and impactful way to support our mission.**

Your generosity helps deliver nutritious meals and vital connection to homebound seniors and individuals with disabilities throughout Mercer County.



To recommend a gift, please use the following information:

- Search for us by name or EIN [22-1990231]
- Please indicate your gift is for general support unless otherwise noted
- Many donors give through providers like Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, and Vanguard Charitable



Check our [website](#) for updated tribute dedication acknowledgements!

*(currently listing donations received Jan. 1, 2026 though March 31, 2026)*

---

**Contact Us: (609) 695-3483 or Email at [info@mealsonwheelsmercer.org](mailto:info@mealsonwheelsmercer.org)**



Meals on Wheels of Mercer Coun | 320 Hollowbrook Drive | Ewing, NJ 08638 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!