



Helping Butler County Older Adults Manage the COVID-19 Crisis

Central Connections adapts congregate meal program to serve older adults during pandemic; older adults receive special meal at pickup

May 28, 2020

During the COVID-19 pandemic, “business as usual” is not, by any means, usual. Through this crisis, one priority has been ensuring adequate food supplies for area seniors. Staff at Council on Aging (COA), Butler County’s Elderly Services Program (ESP) and the regional service provider network have found creative ways to continue serving meals to area seniors in need.

For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, Central Connections adapted their congregate meal program to be a pick-up-and-go meal program. Each Thursday, older adults wait in line in their cars, as Executive Director Monica Smith and her team put bags of food and drink into their trunks.

In the Middletown area for more than 65 years, Central Connections is a nonprofit senior center helping adults over age 50 to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Besides congregate meals, the center provides many services, including home-delivered meals, independent living assistance and transportation, to Butler County older adults who are enrolled in ESP.

On Thursday, May 28, participants who arrived for their “carry out” meal were treated to something special. In addition to their regular meal pickup, participants received a meal from Taste of Belgium, including country fried steak and scrambled eggs.

During the pandemic, COA has partnered with area restaurants, including Taste of Belgium, LaRosa’s, Frisch’s and others to provide special meals for seniors who may be in need during this time. ESP provider organization help to pick up and deliver the food. More than 10,000 of these meals have been distributed throughout COA’s service area, including in Butler County. Many of the meal recipients are enrolled in Butler County’s Elderly Services Program.



“What a surprise! I’m here to pick up meals for myself and a friend, and I’m thrilled to have the extra food,” says Audrey, 88. Audrey has been a congregate meal regular for 10 years and normally visits the center five days per week. She misses her center friends but is able to keep in touch with phone calls.

Scott, 73, and Becky, 83, pulled up in a black sedan. They have enjoyed living in the Middletown area all their lives, and especially enjoy the meals provided by Central Connections. They are looking forward to trying Taste of Belgium food – they have heard it’s good. Scott smiles when he says, “I like about everything to eat – especially fish. I haven’t had [fresh] fish in a while.”

When Kathy, 66, found out about the availability of the meals, she broke down in tears. “I was wondering what I was going to do. I’m waiting for my unemployment, and was down to \$1.94 in my bank account. It really made my day. The Taste of Belgium waffles – yum! I set them aside for my dessert, and after I finished the scrambled eggs and country fried steak, I ate the waffles with some Irish butter and syrup. What a treat!”

Jim, 78, and Marcia, 68, waited in the line of cars to pick up their meals for the week. They have been members at Central Connections for four years, and “feel really good” about the meals they have received during the pandemic. “It’s good food,” Jim says. “I’m looking forward to getting back inside, but I enjoy what there is now.”

When Phillip, 67, picked up meals for himself and his partner, Debbie, he was happy to be able to stock the refrigerator. “I grew up on a farm and had eight brothers and sisters, so [at the dinner table] if you didn’t get it quick, it wasn’t there!”

After hearing about the meals from a friend, Diana, 73, is thankful for the food. “It helps so much with the grocery bill – thank you.”

Beth, 64, visited Central Connections to pick up meals for herself, her husband, her pastor and her mother. She worked as the branch manager for the credit union that occupied the building prior to Central Connections, and it just seemed natural to support Middletown and become a member of the senior center.

Floyd, 72, and Ulysses, 63, have been picking up their meals at Central Connections throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They heard about the service from a friend, and Ulysses is especially thankful for the meals because of his bad leg. After a stroke left his right side weak, it became difficult to cook, and having a prepared meal to put in the microwave is “all part of God’s plan” for him.

Bob, 61, is the full-time caretaker for Jim, 68. They normally play pool and attend exercise classes in the center, but since the coronavirus crisis hit, they have been spending a lot of time at a local park. “Did you know ducks like to eat peanuts?” Jim jokingly asked. “And thanks to the meals, I only have to go to the store once a month now.”

For more information about how Council on Aging and the Elderly Services Program are serving older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit www.help4seniors.org. Any senior who needs help during the COVID-19 pandemic should contact Council on Aging at 513-721-1025 or Butler County ESP at (513) 868-9281.