

Guest Editorial

by **Ellen Campbell - President/CEO, Meals On Wheels Plus of Manatee**

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Bradenton, FL. There is no doubt that everyone is pinching pennies and trying to save money in the current economy, and Meals on Wheels PLUS of Manatee is no different. While increased food and transportation costs have made it more expensive to continue serving the hungry in our community, we have maintained our ratio of contributing 93 cents of each dollar we receive back into our programs for children, families, and seniors. This is far above the Better Business Bureau standard of 65 cents. I point this out because our donors and supporters should know that despite current challenges, Meals on Wheels PLUS of Manatee is an excellent steward of the funds we receive. Our organization is diverse, with over a dozen programs to serve the local community. This allows us to keep administrative costs low, and put as many resources as possible into feeding our neighbors in need.

For those who may not know, Meals on Wheels PLUS does not simply serve seniors. Through our many programs, we provide food and caring supportive services to the hungry of all ages, from infants to elders. While our organization began with the traditional “meals on wheels” service, in which volunteers deliver hot meals to homebound or disabled seniors, we have continually expanded to meet the growing demands of our community. In addition to offering transportation, friendship dining, and adult day services, Meals on Wheels PLUS took on operation of The Food Bank of Manatee in 1984.

The Food Bank of Manatee is the largest hunger prevention organization in the county. Over 100 local food pantries and social service agencies receive food from our warehouse to feed the hungry. The Food Bank of Manatee also fills requests for Emergency Family & Baby Baskets, which offer temporary assistance to people in crisis. As you can imagine, the economy and the continually rising unemployment rate (currently 12.7%) have resulted in an unprecedented number of requests. In 2008, The Food Bank of Manatee distributed over 2 million pounds of food – enough for over 1.5 million meals. Because of the growing need, the distribution in 2009 was more than 3 million pounds. Our staff of six has remained the same, working with efficiency and with heart, to ensure that no one requesting food is going hungry.

As with most non-profits, Meals on Wheels PLUS of Manatee is dependent upon volunteers, pledges, and donations. Since the local economy has dramatically declined, we are more dependent than ever on the generosity of others. As a result, we are also more determined to be as efficient as possible with donated funds, and to continue keeping 100% right here in Manatee County.

Pledges from individuals, businesses and companies, are crucial to Meals on Wheels PLUS. As a promise to contribute a certain amount of money over a specific amount of time, we depend on these pledges. We sincerely thank all those who have met their pledges and continued their payments to assist our programs in this time of need.

If there is one thing that has become evident during the last few years, it is the fact that life is uncertain. One thing that is certain, however, is the commitment of Meals on Wheels PLUS to this community. Though we are facing tremendous challenges, our organization has vowed to never turn away someone requesting our services. The generosity of our donors makes this possible, and we ask that you consider Meals on Wheels PLUS of Manatee in your charitable giving. Together we can ensure that no child, senior or family in our community ever goes hungry.

For more information visit www.mealsonwheelsplus.org or call 941-747-4655.