

More Than Meals on Wheels: A Vital Link



Sybil Weekley

Sybil Weekley is one of the many Red Deer Meals on Wheels clients who has lunch delivered Monday through Friday. She lives in a quiet city neighbourhood in her family home, which is well maintained with the loving help of neighbours and Home Care.

“I am grateful for a very necessary service,” said Sybil. “Not only for the meals, but because someone comes in every day during the week. They use my name, I have someone to speak to, some connection with the outside world. That’s very important. Otherwise I listen to CBC from early morning until afternoon and I read a lot.”

On Thursdays, Sybil’s lunch is delivered by Dick and Donna Draves, and the visit is about more than dropping off food. Sybil has had good relationships with many of her Meals on Wheels drivers.

“They’re all very fine people,” she said. “Donna is particularly special, and my previous driver Barry calls me from Comox, B.C. Valdene and Bill still want to bring my food at Christmas. They are all wonderful people and we have long-term relationships.” Donna Draves has been dedicated to volunteering her time to Meals on Wheels for over 20 years. She retired from being a Home Economics teacher in 1994. While still teaching, a volunteer from Meals on Wheels would occasionally make a presentation to her class, and Draves became interested in joining the agency.

“Our people are hands-on people,” said Donna. They do their fundraising at the gas pump by donating their gas and time. They do this with their own money and their own vehicles.”

There are different crews every day of the week. Some work in pairs, some work on their own. Meals are prepared in the Red Deer Curling Club kitchen. Each day the meal consists of soup, an entrée with protein, starch and a vegetable, and dessert. Salads appear on the menu twice per week. Donna delivers meals with her husband Dick on Thursdays – with Dick taking care of the driving and Donna handling the lunches. It’s a slick operation, and the couple can deliver nutritious lunches quickly enough to ensure the last meals dropped off are still piping hot.

Before they leave on their rounds, Thursday’s ten drivers meet in the Pidherney Centre for a quick coffee, a treat, and a chat. It could be about anything – someone’s holiday, a previous delivery run, or an inquiry about a relative’s health. Red Deer Meals on Wheels Executive Director Cheryl Day has a quick chat about the

day's schedule. After about 15 minutes, the food is ready to be loaded into vehicles and everyone springs into action.



Donna and Dick Draves

The Drave's are off to the home of a couple in a nearby neighbourhood. Across the street, they drop off another meal to someone living alone. From there, they head downtown to drop off meals to a man living in an apartment, and another man in a house who reminds them about a horticultural show taking place that afternoon. After delivering lunch to a client in an apartment in the city's north-end, the Draves stop at Sybil's home.

Sybil wants people to understand how important this link to the outside world is. "I'm not unique," Sybil said. "But to stay in my house, it means everything to me."