



# The Chairman's Corner

by

**Matt B. Murell**

[Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com](mailto:Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com)

## MEALS ON WHEELS SEEKS VOLUNTEERS

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Right up front, I'll say it: There's no mistaking week's column as anything other than a Help Wanted ad.

To cut directly to the chase, the Columbia County Office for the Aging is in critical need of volunteers for its Home-Delivered Meals program, also known as Meals on Wheels.

"Ideally, we would like to get everyone hot meals delivered every day," OFA Administrator Nina Benvenuto said. However, she added, "The way it stands right now with our Home-Delivered Meals program, depending on where you are in the county, and depending on how many active volunteers we have at any given moment, there are some areas of the county where we don't have a sufficient number of volunteers" to accomplish that goal.

As a result, there are those who receive a delivery of frozen meals once per week rather than a hot meal daily. At this time, 300-500 meals are delivered per day – depending on the day -- around the county, which includes frozen meals, under the Home-Delivered Meals program. Strict New York State guidelines state that all meals be maintained within a specific temperature range, which in turn dictates how many meals a volunteer would be able to deliver on a route.

Administrator Benvenuto pointed out that in more than a handful of areas around the county, only one or two volunteers, or perhaps even none, are now active, leaving those areas desperately in need of volunteers. Naturally, the list of those who are Home-Delivered Meals recipients and the volunteer roster continually fluctuate. Further, oftentimes a volunteer may be available only one or two days per week, which of course leaves a hole in terms of the remaining days.

Not only do all Home-Delivered Meals volunteers receive annual training, at the same time they are educated in OFA programs and services, she said. Further, there are benefits to serving as a volunteer, which the Home-Delivered Meals manual spells out:

- Volunteers are better off physically.
- Volunteers either maintained or improved physical functioning during their time as volunteers.
- Volunteers have higher life satisfaction.
- Volunteers are less lonely, and they increase friendship through volunteering.
- Volunteers anticipate meeting new friends through the volunteer experience.
- Volunteers have an increased sense of belonging, increasing their sense of value and purpose.

"The incentive here is to help keep your neighbors home, independent, and maintaining their dignity – they may be independent in all ways at home but maybe they can't get out to shop," said Administrator Benvenuto. "It takes a little bit of time to make a huge impact on peoples' lives."