

# MOTION

SUMMER 2023



## INSIDE

Letter from the CEO	3
Tales from the Tables	4-7
Joining the Movement	7-8



# LETTER FROM THE CEO



DINERS  
CLUB

# FROM SOLITUDE TO SOLIDARITY

When the U.S. surgeon general recently issued an advisory on the growing issue of loneliness and social isolation, I was not surprised. As the leader of this amazing organization, I have the privilege to connect with many of our participants and hear their stories. These intimate narratives consistently echo a deep-seated sentiment of loneliness that far too many of the older adults in our community are facing.

As the surgeon general emphasized, isolation can lead to serious health issues, including mental health concerns like anxiety and depression, as well as physical ailments such as heart disease and decreased immunity. It is a public health crisis that demands our attention, compassion, and action. Over the years, we have heard poignant stories of isolation that mirror the concerns expressed in the surgeon general's advisory. Our participants have shared how days, sometimes weeks, can pass without meaningful human interaction. Their narratives resonate with us and fuel our determination to make a positive change.

In response to the increasing needs of our clients, we have put in place various initiatives to help combat loneliness and

social isolation among our aging neighbors. As you'll read about, our congregate dining program offers communal spaces for older adults to enjoy meals together. These spaces are more than dining sites — they're places of connection and conversation, helping to alleviate feelings of isolation and build a supportive community. We're also launching the Diners Club, which will offer older adults more menu choices, greater flexibility, and the ability to dine with friends and family members of all ages at various times of the day at participating restaurants throughout the Portland-Vancouver metro area.

Understanding that some older adults may not be able to leave their homes, we introduced Friendly Chats. This program enables volunteers to connect with isolated older adults through phone calls, offering companionship, conversation, and a listening ear, a simple yet powerful tool in combating loneliness. Additionally, we partner with Senior Planet to give older adults access to technology training, enabling them to stay connected with loved ones and the world around them digitally. And, of course, when delivering meals, our volunteers and staff don't merely drop off food; they also provide

an invaluable human connection. Each visit is an opportunity for a warm greeting, a check-in, and a chat, lessening feelings of isolation and providing a familiar, friendly face to look forward to.

In light of the surgeon general's advisory, it is clear that we are not only addressing a need but a public health crisis. Our programs and initiatives at MOWP are designed to provide a lifeline of connection to older adults who might otherwise feel forgotten. The stories we hear from our clients serve as powerful reminders of the importance of our mission. As we move forward, we will continue to listen, adapt, and innovate so every older adult feels valued, connected, and part of a caring community.



Suzanne Washington  
CEO, Meals on Wheels People



Suzanne Washington  
Chief Executive Officer

*Help an older  
adult now!*  
→





# Tales from the Tables

*An inside look at how Meals on Wheels People's congregate lunches serve up more than just food, providing older adults with a platform for connection, camaraderie, and community engagement*

Walk into the Luepke Senior Center at 11:20 a.m. on a Wednesday, and you'll see a line of older adults waiting to get into the Meals on Wheels People congregate lunch. The doors don't open for another 10 minutes, but the diners are excited. For many, this is their chance to connect with friends, meet new people, and build a solid support network. For others, it's the one hot, nutritious meal they'll have all day.

At 11:30 a.m., longtime volunteer Joanne Castaldo opens the doors and takes her position behind the check-in desk. "If you don't open that door at 11:30, they'll open the door and yell down," she says.

Meals on Wheels People operates 16 dining centers throughout the Portland-Vancouver metro areas that serve congregate lunches at least one day a week. Meals are offered free of charge, though

participants can make a donation. On the surface, these centers seem to be about providing a nutritious meal to those who might not otherwise have access to one. But the benefits of the congregate lunch program extend much beyond mere physical health. The true value of these lunches lies in the deeper, more holistic nourishment they provide. In these dining rooms, participants find themselves immersed in a space where shared lived experiences breed a sense of belonging and mutual understanding, an environment where they are not just accepted but truly seen.

"Somebody has to love us old people as elders," says 88-year-old Joanne, a retired kindergarten teacher who has been volunteering since 2018 and knows nearly every diner by name. "I think that's the biggest thing — they find similarities because sometimes our expertise or our knowledge isn't asked for.

They buzz about things they've done. They buzz about things that they've read. It gives them a chance to show how smart they are, how intelligent they are. They love to talk about their life. They like to talk about what they did in life. It's important to them — to let people know they were important at some point in their life."

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Teckla walks into the MOWP Luepke Center dining room and goes straight to her table — the same table she's been sitting at for seven years. Back then, it was known as Tony's Table (actually, they called it Tony's Harem, but that's another story). After Tony passed away, Teckla took over. Soon she's joined by Lynne, Mike, Jean, Ruth, Kathy, Wally, and Sylvia.

Teckla and Lynne met at the pool at the senior center and started staying for lunch after their swim.

Jean and Teckla worked in the kitchen at Vancouver Public Schools together. It took some time for Teckla to convince Jean to come to lunch. "I lost both my children, my husband, and my sister all pretty much together," Jean says. "Teckie would just keep saying, 'You just gotta come down and have lunch.' I walked in and felt immediately at home. I really did." She's been coming ever since.

Kathy joined the table with her now-deceased husband. "After we got engaged, he brought me over here to these lovely people," she says. "He's passed away now, but I love all the friends I have from here. After



my husband died, these people were supporting me. I don't know what I'd done without it."

Mike and Ruth are new to the group. Because Teckla's Table is right by the front door, new diners don't get very far before they receive an invitation. "They collected me and pulled me into their group," says Ruth, who started coming to the congregate lunches in March. "I walked in, and they said, 'You're new? You're sitting with us!'"

As the diners wait for their table to be called to walk through the food line, they discuss specials at Grocery Outlet, birthdays and zodiac signs, knee pain, how to keep squirrels off of bird feeders, and their friend who passed away last week, Richard. "That's why it's so important for us to be together," Teckla says. Adds Lynne: "We need each other."

Table 1 is last to be called — they were too busy talking and laughing to notice — and the diners make their way through the food line, picking up a salad, chicken and rice soup, Southwest beef and rice casserole or chicken with sour cream gravy, a fruit cup, and



## MOWP Launches

# DINERS CLUB



Amidst the clatter of cutlery and conversations at a Meals on Wheels People dining center during congregate lunch, an opportunity is rising. Cultural diversity is growing among MOWP participants, **with 34% identifying as part of an ethnic or nondominant culture**, and many diners long for food from their own cultural tradition. Additionally, congregate dining continues to decline in popularity as many older adults want a less institutional dining experience.

As part of our ongoing strategic initiative to modernize our meal service, we launched the innovative Diners Club in March 2023. This program fosters partnerships with local restaurants, particularly those providing ethnically diverse meal options or serving rural areas. Participating restaurants — equipped with MOWP-approved menus and incentivized by factors such as attracting new customers, increasing revenue, and supporting the community — offer older adults culturally diverse culinary choices, flexible dining hours, and inviting spaces. The program allows for increased intergenerational socializing within the general public and when family members join diners for a meal out. The Diners Club also has significant implications for MOWP participants who are geographically isolated, offering a nearby social dining experience where we previously could only provide home delivery or a meal site outside their immediate neighborhood.

In the first two months of the program, nearly 50 diners have signed up, and The Diner Vancouver has become the first restaurant to offer a Diners Club menu. Efforts are ongoing to recruit more restaurants and diners into the program. The Diners Club is an exciting step forward for MOWP, promising flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and the joy of shared meals. It embodies MOWP's commitment to enriching the lives of older adults with meals that offer not just nutrition but also a sense of comfort, joy, and belonging.





chocolate zucchini cake. The conversation never stops. They talk about how good the gravy is, the TV show *Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern*, a friend who recently broke her hip, their siblings, upcoming travel. “I’d be lost without coming here,” Teckla says. Adds Kathy: “As we get older, it’s kinda lonely sometimes. It helps a lot.”

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At Meals on Wheels People’s Martin Luther King Center located at the Multnomah County building in Northeast Portland, a group of gentlemen play dominos while some participants fill out satisfaction surveys and others share photos from the MOWP Stride for Seniors event in April. Then there’s 80-year-old volunteer Jessie Porter, making rounds with her coffee cart, adding a warm touch to the already inviting atmosphere.

As noon approaches, the center’s program manager, David Lomax, dials down the blues tunes as he welcomes everyone to Thursday’s lunch, detailing the upcoming nutrition education event and the annual Senior Center Fashion Show, sponsored by the Urban

League of Portland, also located at the center. Then David asks for a volunteer to bless the food. Mrs. Franzine volunteers: “Thank you for one more day – one more day to get it right.”

Post-prayer, Franzine joins Alfredia, Carolyn, and Mable at a table near the back. They often eat together but not always. Like many of the regulars at MLK, they’ve lived in this neighborhood for years, and nearly everyone knows everyone: Carolyn and Alfredia both attended Jefferson High School. Alfredia’s younger sister, Iris, sits at the next table. Mable volunteered at the MLK Center as a delivery driver for 26 years before she started coming for lunch.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, Alfredia eats lunch at MOWP’s Cherry Blossom Center at the East Portland Community Center. But she considers MLK her home center. She attributes a significant part of her affection for MLK to David. His dedication to creating a lively and engaging environment is apparent in the varied events he plans. From celebrating Juneteenth, a day that marks the emancipation of those who had been enslaved in the United States, to the

attending the vibrant local festival known as Good in the Hood, David ensures that the center is not just a place to eat but a place to live, learn, and celebrate. The events provide opportunities for Alfredia and other diners to engage with their culture and history and to connect with their community in a meaningful way.

Franzine captures the essence of why places like the MLK Center are so crucial. It offers a refuge of shared experience, a haven where people can gather and be among those who truly understand their journeys: “Instead of trying to get to someplace you don’t fit in because you don’t see anybody who has been through what you’ve been through or been where you’ve been, here it’s easy.”

For Franzine, like so many others, MOWP dining centers aren’t just places to eat — they are a vital lifeline. More than a meal, Meals on Wheels People provides a sense of belonging, a sentiment that is often harder to find but far more nourishing.

To read more tales from the tables, head to our website: [mowp.org/2023/07/tales-from-the-tables](https://mowp.org/2023/07/tales-from-the-tables).



# Joining the Movement

*Meals on Wheels People welcomes Barry Bahmanyar and Barbara Basney to its board of directors.*

In March 2023, Meals on Wheels People welcomed two exceptional individuals to the board of directors. Barbara Basney and Barry Bahmanyar come with diverse professional backgrounds and a shared passion for community service. They have each made significant strides in their respective fields and are expected to provide valuable insights and strategies to further enhance the effectiveness of the Meals on Wheels People movement to help older adults in our community live independently in their own homes and make sure they don't feel alone, disconnected, or hungry.



**Barbara Basney**  
*Kaiser Permanente*



**Barry Bahmanyar**  
*MORE Realty*

## Driving Change

Barbara Basney couldn't have known in 2019, when she joined Kaiser Permanente as its vice president of marketing, communications and brand, that the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic was right around the corner. For over two years, it was "always on" communications to keep the public as well as Kaiser Permanente's 11,000 employees and 635,000 members and patients safe and cared for. She also led marketing, branding, PR, and communications for All4Oregon, the mass vaccination site at the Oregon Convention Center. This nationally innovative health care system partnership between Kaiser Permanente, Legacy Health, OHSU, and Providence enabled over 500,000 vaccinations to be delivered in only three months — a game-changer for the health of the greater Portland-metro community.

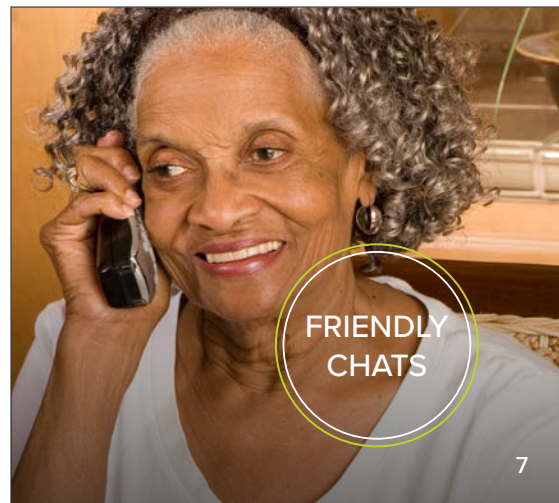
It's not the first time Barbara pulled together a successful campaign. As vice president of global advertising, media, and brand for Xerox Corp., she spearheaded several brand repositioning campaigns, the last of which was "Set the Page Free," a project that resulted in an anthology on the modern workplace, including works by Joyce Carol Oates, Roxane Gay, Lee Child, and Aimee Mann; a series of videos; and a book entitled *Speaking of Work*, which was used to demonstrate the "unexpected relevance of Xerox."

Prior to Xerox, she spent more than 15 years in marketing,

strategy, and advertising for both B2B and B2C Fortune 100 corporations including Rite Aid, Tektronix, and Convergys.

"I was always interested in marketing, advertising, and compelling communications," says Barbara, who was born in New Jersey but grew up in Germany. "It gave me an appreciation and appetite for testing and trying new things." But, she says, "Effective marketing and communications isn't just about how creative you can be or about following the latest new trend or technology — it's about effectively hitting the objectives with the target audience."

As a MOWP board member, Barbara brings her expertise in branding, social media, communications, and marketing to help develop strategies to raise awareness about MOWP's services. "I hear about the great work everybody is doing, but it's in my blood to look for ways to evolve, test, and try things," says Barbara, who also volunteers once a week at a food bank. "There's always room for more evolution."





## Diverse Voices

Barry Bahmanyar is no stranger to the nonprofit world. Although he spent over 30 years in construction engineering, sales, and management, he also founded a nonprofit professional networking group for Iranian Americans, has been the volunteer co-host of the Persian Hour Art & Music show on KBOO for 23 years, and spent four years as the senior program manager with Impact NW — which is where he met Suzanne Washington, who, at the time, was deputy director of Impact NW.

Co-located with MOWP's Belmont Center at Tabor Square, Impact NW's Multicultural Service Center provided a hub of activity where older adults gathered for exercise classes, meals, games, celebrations, and friendship. Barry was in charge of the activities. He also oversaw transportation services, which helped schedule thousands of rides each year to seniors and adults with disabilities who needed help getting to medical appointments or performing errands, and assisted the program director with budgeting,

grant writing, and collaborating with service partners. "I was blessed with working with people who really work hard to make life easier on their clients," he says.

That's been one of Barry's goals since he moved to Oregon from Iran in 1972. "I believe that we all get where we are on someone else's shoulders," he says. "Someone else is grabbing your hand and moving you along. That's been one of my goals. Any time I can give a helping hand, I'll do my best."

As a founding member of the Iranian American Professional Society of Oregon, Barry worked to advance and promote Iranian professionals and the Persian culture in the great Portland metro area. The nonprofit also awarded over \$150,000 in scholarships to over 300 Iranian American high school students. Every Sunday from 11 a.m. to noon, listeners can hear Barry's voice on KBOO 90.7 FM, though, unless they speak Persian or Farsi, they might not understand what he's saying. The one-hour radio show aims to promote the rich Persian culture and its music. "I love everything about it," he says.



When Barry's not working in the nonprofit world, he's selling houses with MORE Realty. "I'm just not a retired kind of person," he says. "I love working with people and problem-solving. We do a lot of it in selling and buying real estate."

As a MOWP board member, Barry understands the significance of representing a diverse group of individuals within the community and will work to ensure that MOWP's services are accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of the community it serves. "I'm hoping that my life experience — coming from a diverse group of folks who live in Oregon — is something that I can talk about when it comes to diversity and inclusion."

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