



FOOD *for* THOUGHT

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WARMEST wishes

To our: Clients, Volunteers & Community Supporters

President's Message



On behalf of the Board of Directors of Meals on Wheels, Fredericton Inc. I want to wish you and your family a healthy, happy and restful holiday season. We truly appreciate the dedicated volunteers and staff who allow us to provide such an important service to our community. We are approaching 80,000 meals delivered annually and expect to this number to continue to grow. Be safe and strong during these challenging times.

Respectfully,


Jeff Deane, President



“Debbie Effect”

DEBBIE CARPENTER'S affiliation with Meals on Wheels began in 1983 when her uncle, Sid Nason, a MOW board member, phoned her and said he had a job for her--- but she wouldn't be getting paid. MOW needed volunteer drivers and Uncle Sid thought since Debbie wasn't working at the time, this would be a good fit for her! Debbie agreed and became a substitute driver on the Northside filling in several times a month. There were no police checks and no training then, so Debbie simply showed up at York Manor and took on a route. After about a month of delivering, Debbie invited her neighbour, Gladys Smith, to help her with deliveries. Gladys liked volunteering and soon got her own route, and the two women did their routes together. Debbie and Gladys enjoyed their time with each other, as well as their interactions with the very grateful clients.

Debbie moved from volunteer status to staff member in 1985. Joyce Wood, MOW coordinator at that time, asked Debbie to submit a resume to MOW as they needed to hire a part-time staff person. With little background in office work, Debbie was hesitant to apply, but after repeated encouragement from Joyce, she submitted a hand-written resume on one sheet of paper. Joyce obviously saw beyond typing skills and hired Debbie as part-time office assistant.

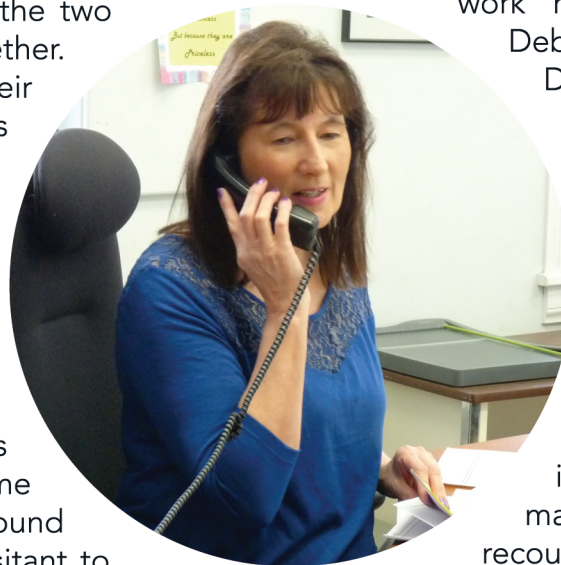
Debbie's new job was multi-faceted. At that time, the office was in a former hospital room at The Victoria Health Centre. It was outfitted with a used teacher's desk for Joyce, a smaller desk for Debbie and a couple of chairs. Technology was limited but Joyce did have a typewriter, an electric calculator, and a phone; there were no computers and no photocopiers. A third of the room was hidden by a hospital curtain behind which they stored supplies such as meal containers and other packaging supplies. These came in large cardboard cartons

and had to be housed in the MOW office as the depots had no space to keep them. Debbie and Joyce distributed these supplies when they were needed which entailed lugging the cartons through the VHC, packing them in their cars, and delivering them to the depots.

The priority at the office every morning was to make sure there were enough drivers to cover all the routes. They might get a call at 9 am from a driver whose car wouldn't start, or had a flat tire, or for some other reason, could not be available that day. Debbie and Joyce would then scramble to get another driver, and if they couldn't, they would fill in and do the deliveries themselves.

Route sheets were a big part of the job. Two copies of each route sheet were completed by hand by Joyce and Debbie. This required time beyond office hours, so both Joyce and Debbie took work home with them. Soon after Debbie began working at MOW, at Debbie's suggestion, they increased the routes on the Northside from 3 to 5 per week. Debbie was mainly responsible for the Northside routes, and Joyce was responsible for the Southside.

Throughout the years with MOW, Debbie has had interesting interactions and has many anecdotes to share. She recounts her experience with one lady on her route when she was a volunteer driver. Every time she went to the home and encountered the woman, she was impressed by her



Goodbye to _____ **DEBBIE CARPENTER** retiring after 38 years with MOW

outward appearance. Approximately 50 years old, the lady was always dressed up with lipstick and pearls, and her hair was perfectly coifed.

She looked ready to go out. The woman was not particularly responsive to Debbie's friendly greetings or attempts at conversation. In fact, she was rather ill-humoured and would complain that the meal was late. Debbie was puzzled as to why this woman would need MOW; she appeared to be on the young end of the spectrum, healthy and fashionable. Debbie thought perhaps she was taking advantage of the system. Relatively shy at the time, Debbie was trying to work up the courage to discuss her suspicions with Joyce. One day, the lady was no longer on her route list. When she checked in at the end of her shift, Joyce told her that the woman had died. Debbie was shocked and sees that experience as a valuable life lesson. *"You don't know what people are going through and you shouldn't make judgements based on outward appearances."* Debbie relies on that lesson to this day.

In the early days, drivers collected the money from clients on Fridays and then passed it on to Joyce. Debbie tells the story of one driver, a proper gentleman, who went to a home, knocked, and entered the house when he heard the lady yell, "Come in." The driver stepped inside to the empty living room. He waited for the client. When she didn't appear, he yelled, "Hello, I'm collecting today." There was no response. The driver waited, then began to whistle, hoping to make his presence known. When there was still no response, he yelled out again, "I really have to get going." At that point he heard the client respond, "I need help." The lady then came hobbling out of her bedroom wearing a flannelette nightie but tangled up in her housecoat having put her leg through the armhole. "Sonny, could you give me a hand?" Somewhat embarrassed and puzzled by her strange predicament, he obliged then carried on with the rest of his deliveries.

In the late 1990s, Debbie and Joyce started Wheels to Meals, a weekly program which strives to address the issues of isolation and loneliness. Transportation is provided for seniors to attend the program where they dine, socialize, and enjoy entertainment. Debbie recalls a MOW client from Marysville whom she encouraged to attend. The man was a bachelor and had lived alone most of his life. He told Debbie that he would occasionally take the bus to downtown Fredericton and go to a lunch

counter so he could sit beside someone while he ate. When he attended Wheels to Meals, he would hang back while the other seniors took their places at tables. When Debbie offered to help him find a seat, he told her he was waiting to see where everyone was sitting, then he would scout out which table to sit at. He liked to choose a different group of people to eat with each week.

Debbie received many phone calls at work from MOW clients. The clients might phone to inquire about a meal, or compliment them on a meal, or thank them for a meal. Debbie could tell, in many cases, they were lonely and just phoning to talk. She listened and talked to them. She was genuinely interested in what they had to say and gave them her time. She vividly remembers a call from a client one afternoon. When Debbie asked him how his meal had been that day, he started to cry. He told her he would need MOW more often now. He had to give up his driver's license and his son was going to sell his car. Debbie recognized the sadness he felt losing that independence in his life. She says, *"Sometimes a listening ear is as important as the meal."*

Over the years, Debbie became an expert in mapping out delivery routes. A sort of human GPS, she looked at route development as a puzzle to be solved and became very familiar with the streets of Fredericton. She streamlined the routes to operate in the most efficient manner ensuring that they would take the least amount of time, and that they would be balanced fairly among the drivers. Debbie says at one time she knew every street in Fredericton but as the city grows, she can no longer say that.

Debbie has witnessed many changes and much growth throughout her years with MOW. In the 90s, she became a full-time staff member. A computer program was designed specifically for MOW in the early 90s, and that improved efficiency in the administration of the organization.



In January 2018, a long-time dream was realized when MOW opened its own kitchen and moved the offices to its current location on Hanwell Road. Debbie proudly reports, "On the first day at the new kitchen we put out 14 meals, and they are now doing around 240 meals per day." Currently, MOW staff has grown to 12 people and 250 volunteers. Last year, MOW delivered more than 70,000 meals and project they will deliver 80, 000 this year.

Debbie speaks highly of both the clients and the volunteers. When asked what the best part of the job was, she is quick to respond. "It is the people." She admits she has a special fondness for older people and is pleased that MOW makes a difference in the lives of their clients by providing not only nutritious meals, but also human kindness and a sense of security. Debbie speaks with admiration and appreciation for the MOW volunteers. The highlight of her workday was seeing the drivers off at the depots; she considered them to be her work family. "They're just good people. You can't help but care about them." She has been pleasantly surprised by the level of response from volunteers. At times she hesitated to ask a volunteer to fill in or take on another route, and she was always blown away by their willingness to answer the call. "They are kind, good-hearted people who jump in when needed."

The feeling is mutual. Volunteers, clients, work colleagues have nothing but praise and respect for Debbie. In fact, there seems to be something almost magic about her. Volunteers admit that they do not want to say no to her. They do not feel pressured or coerced in any way, they just want to help her out. "The Debbie Effect"—hard to define, but firmly established. One driver says on the rare occasion when she had to phone and cancel her shift, there was never any trace of disappointment or reprimand from Debbie. She only expressed concern for the driver. That sort of care elicits and maintains strong commitment from volunteers; it's a quiet sort of leadership. Work colleagues speak of Debbie's dedication to the mandate of MOW. Betty Daniels, current Executive Director of MOW, describes Debbie's loyalty and tenacity. "When someone stays with an organization for that long, through so much growth,

so many challenges, there is something about that ... she just did not give up or walk away at any point and I know there were times when another person would have." One Executive Director, upon leaving their position made the following statement, "Whatever you do, hang on to Debbie Carpenter." Another Executive Director noted that Debbie had the valuable and unique combination of being "both efficient and caring."

After nearly four decades with Meals on Wheels, Debbie's current resume would be much longer than the one-page, hand-written sheet she handed Joyce Wood in 1985, and it would include these words—innovator, problem-solver, leader, active listener, kind, caring, genuine, humble, sensitive, positive, flexible, calm, efficient, hard-working, tenacious, organized, sympathetic, empathetic, respectful, compassionate, loyal, committed, kind, kind, kind.

Debbie Carpenter officially retired from Meals on Wheels in 2021 following 38 years of extraordinary dedication and service to the organization. We thank her for her immeasurable contribution and wish her all the best in her future pursuits. Debbie leaves us with these parting words "Because of so many wonderful people, Meals on Wheels will be forever in my heart and a cherished part of my life."

- Barb Fullerton, November 2021

MANY THANKS to the Food Services Department of the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital for once again providing wonderful Christmas meals for all of our clients!

THANK YOU!
TO OUR BUSINESS
OF THE *Month*

