

Harrison seniors will get 2 months of food

by JoAnn Snoderly
STAFF WRITER

CLARKSBURG — The Mountaineer Food Bank and Harrison County Senior Citizens Center will provide two months of meals for over 500 county seniors in an effort to keep them fed while meeting social distancing guidelines.

Each month, the two organizations feed hundreds

of seniors through a senior nutrition program.

Typically, food boxes prepared by Mountaineer Food Bank with shelf-stable products are delivered to the Harrison County Senior Citizens Center for distribution. Seniors who are able to pick up their boxes do so at the senior center at a drive-thru location behind it.

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Submitted photo

United Rentals donated time, equipment and manpower to help the Mountaineer Food Bank and Harrison County Senior Citizens Center transport 1,000 food boxes.

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The rest of the boxes are delivered directly to seniors in their homes.

However, to limit the potential for transmission of COVID-19 from face-to-face interaction, the food bank and senior center will provide enough food boxes in April to get participating seniors through two months.

The change also will ensure that seniors have their meals if senior center staff should become infected in the coming weeks, according to Harrison County Senior Citizens Center IT Administrator Curtis Short.

Disease projections indicate the peak of infections in West Virginia will occur in early May.

United Rentals of Bridgeport donated time and manpower to help transport about 25 skids, each with 40 boxes of food, from the food bank to the senior center.

"Doing it with a pallet jack, taking them in and out of the building, is an ordeal with just 11 pallets, which is what we normally get," Short said.

Calls went out on Friday to inform seniors they could pick up their boxes. Deliveries will be made over the weekend and early next week, according to Barbara Oldaker, who oversees the program for the senior center.

"Our program has really grown. The need is really out there," said Bill O'Field, senior center board president.

When the program started just three years ago, about 100 seniors received food boxes through it. Now, the program serves 505 persons and there is a waiting list, Oldaker said.

These food boxes are a lifeline for many of the seniors on the program, Oldaker said.

"They have nothing left of their income to get anything by the second week by the time they pay everything and get their meds," said Beth Fitzgerald, executive director of the Harrison County Senior Citizens Center. "A lot of our seniors sometimes have to make a decision whether they're going to get their medicine or pay their utilities, or whether they're going to get food."

Lack of transportation for

some seniors also means they can't shop around for better prices, she said.

To further assist seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic, the senior center has also started offering essential shopping to seniors. Individuals who have passed background checks will pick up a check or debit card from the senior, pick up their groceries and other essential items from the store and deliver them with the receipt back to the senior.

"That is a service we are being allowed to offer under the Older Americans Act right now during the COVID-19 pandemic. That was not a service that we were allowed to do before, but now it's become essential. That will help keep seniors in their home," Fitzgerald said.

Seniors who would like to use the essential shopping program can call the in-home services department of the Harrison County Senior Citizens Center. The senior center number is 304-623-6795.

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