

# Meals On Wheels is helping seniors feed their pets

*Program serves more than 40 people with a total of about 55 pets*

By Amy Cavalier

Marge Williamson, 77, has had pets all her life. She currently has a gaggle of cats that she lovingly refers to as her "kids."

"If I didn't have an animal in the house, I'd go stark raving mad," she said. "Psychologically speaking, it's one of the most wonderful things you can have. They don't talk back to you, they don't argue with you, they're companions and they're always there for you."

As a senior living on a fixed income, Williamson said she'd rather go hungry herself than let her "kids" go hungry. Williamson is a client of Visiting Nurse Service Meals On Wheels in Rochester. Although that ensures three meals a day for her, sometimes she admits it can be a struggle coming up with money to feed all her pets. That's why she was excited to learn of Meals On Wheels For Pets, a program Philip Shippers started up in September 2008 with help from a \$1,000 grant from The Seasons of Suppers campaign, a partnership among Banfield, The Pet Hospital, the Banfield Charitable Trust and Meals On Wheels Association of America.



"We wanted to encourage pet ownership because most of our clients are homebound, so we decided let's collect pet food and distribute it to enable seniors to have pets," said Shippers, the program's director.

Now in its third year, Meals On Wheels For Pets serves over 40 people with a total of about 55 pets, according to Shippers.

"That's just the tip of the iceberg," he said. "We could deliver more if we had a consistent source for pet food."

Meals On Wheels For Pets delivered about 3,000 pounds of pet food last year. Shippers said pet food volunteers distribute about 700 pounds of food every other month. With limited supplies though, the program is currently only available to Meals On Wheels participants in the city of Rochester. Meals On Wheels is offered throughout Monroe County. Since 1958, MOW has served 10 million meals to residents in the community. More than 2,200 volunteers deliver 330,000 meals to 900 homebound people daily.

Shippers said Meals On Wheels is feeding people nutritionally, while Meals On Wheels For Pets is feeding people emotionally by enabling them to have companionship.

"One of the things we see with the people we're serving meals to is that they're alone," he said. "They don't have a support system. By having a pet, it eases the feelings of social isolation."

A pet owner himself, Shippers said he and other volunteers with Meals On Wheels For Pets will be working to raise awareness with an event being planned this fall. Donations of cat or dog food can be dropped off to collection boxes at Petco locations in Pittsford, Henrietta, Greece and Irondequoit

or to Banfield, The Pet Hospital in Henrietta. PetSmart in Henrietta will be collecting pet food donations for The Seasons of Supper program from November through January, which will go to Meals On Wheels For Pets in Rochester.

Pet food is delivered on weekends, which gives people who can't volunteer to deliver Meals On Wheels during the week a chance to help out, Shippers said.

Sandy Wurzer, a volunteer with Meals On Wheels For Pets, said they are really looking for a more consistent food supply.

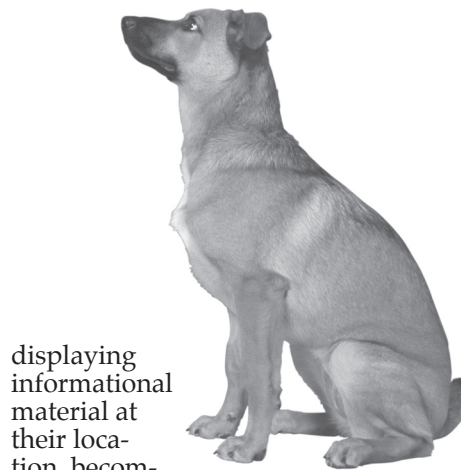
"We'd love to see this get big enough so we can partner with other agencies and even pair seniors up with pets," she said.

Williamson said she thinks Meals on Wheels For Pets is a great idea, both for seniors in need of animal companionship, but for animals that need a home.

"There are so many babies out there that people toss to the wind, so to speak, and they need a home and they need the love that only you or I can give them," she said.

## How to help:

- Businesses can help raise awareness of Meals on Wheels For Pets by



displaying informational material at their location, becoming a Pet Food route sponsor or hosting a fundraising event.

- Individuals can help by volunteering to portion, label and deliver pet food, volunteering at marketing and fundraising events, hosting a fundraising home or work party, or organizing a pet food drive.

Donations of cat or dog food can be dropped off to collection boxes at Petco locations in Pittsford, Henrietta, Greece and Irondequoit or to Banfield, The Pet Hospital in Henrietta. PetSmart in Henrietta will be collecting pet food donations for the program from November through January. Visit [www.vnsnet.com](http://www.vnsnet.com) to donate online or call (585)787-8397 to donate food or to volunteer.

## Safe Handling Tips for Pet Foods and Treats

Consumers can take steps to help prevent foodborne illness, including Salmonella-related illness, when handling pet foods and treats. These products, like many other types of foods, can be susceptible to harmful bacterial contamination.

Salmonella in pet foods and treats can cause serious infections in dogs and cats, and in people too, especially children, older people, and those with compromised immune systems. Salmonella in pet foods and treats potentially can be transferred to people ingesting or handling the contaminated products.

FDA has stepped up its efforts to minimize the incidence of foodborne illness associated with pet foods and treats. Pet owners and consumers can also help reduce the likelihood of infection from contaminated pet foods and treats by following safe handling instructions:

### Buying

- Purchase products in good condition, without signs of damage to the packaging such as dents or tears.

### Preparation

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with hot water and soap before and after handling pet foods and treats.
- Wash pet food bowls, dishes, and scooping utensils with soap and hot water after each use.
- Do not use the pet's feeding bowl

as a scooping utensil—use a clean, dedicated scoop or spoon.

- Dispose of old or spoiled pet food products in a safe manner, such as in a securely tied plastic bag in a covered trash receptacle.

### Storage

- Refrigerate promptly or discard any unused, leftover wet pet food. Refrigerators should be set at 40° F.
- Dry products should be stored in a cool, dry place—under 80° F.
- If possible, store dry pet food in its original bag inside a clean, dedicated plastic container with a lid, keeping the top of the bag folded closed.
- Keep pets away from food storage and preparation areas.
- Keep pets away from garbage and household trash.

### Raw Food Diets

FDA does not believe raw meat foods for animals are consistent with the goal of protecting the public from significant health risks, particularly when these products are brought into the home or used to feed domestic pets; however, we understand that some people prefer to feed these types of diets to their pets.

*This article appears on FDA's Consumer Health Information Web page ([www.fda.gov/](http://www.fda.gov/)) which features the latest on all FDA-regulated products.*

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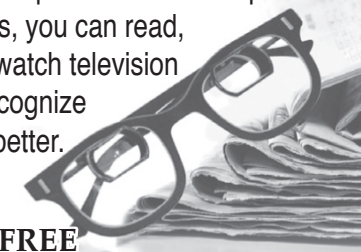
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