

PROVIDING FOOD & MORE DURING CHALLENGING TIMES: FREDERICK ROTARY CLUB'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

By Joanne McCoy, President-elect, The Rotary Club of Frederick

If ever there was a time to put service of others above self, it's now.

As a club, we were painfully aware of the increasing number of individuals in our community whose needs were being intensified due to their risk factors for COVID-19...but how could we help and still observe social distancing restrictions?

We got our answer when our President Mark Lancaster was made aware of 30 local senior citizens for whom the COVID-19 restrictions were potentially devastating. These seniors, all with low, fixed incomes (\$2100 for a single/\$3,000 for a couple, pre-tax), had been relying on a local nonprofit, **SOAR** (Supporting Older Adults through Resources), to help them with their basic needs, including food.

The situation with these 30 seniors had the potential to become very serious, especially since many of them are homebound, due either to pre-existing conditions or elevated risk factors for contracting COVID-19. With churches, senior centers, American Legions, and other gathering places now closed, these seniors were also very lonely—and loneliness increases fear and depression. Understandably, these elderly neighbors were experiencing not only “food insecurity” but a rising level of anxiety as well.

The generous partners who had been assisting SOAR were becoming challenged by the ever-increasing need—reinforcements were clearly needed. I'm proud to share that the Rotary Club of Frederick stepped up, creating and implementing an initiative called **Food & More** in less

than 72 hours.

The goal of Food & More is twofold: 1. To provide twice-monthly deliveries of fresh, frozen, and canned foods to these seniors to help meet their nutritional needs, and 2. To do what we can to provide friendly support and encouragement to keep these older neighbors and community members feeling connected and less anxious during these times of imposed isolation.



In response, our Board came together quickly online and thoroughly vetted a number of possibilities. By unanimous vote, we created Food and More, a 3-4 month program that we were able to fully fund from our financial reserves, a large portion of which resulted from our annual community-wide event, the **Leprechaun Luau®**.

After consulting with SOAR and other eldercare providers, we developed a list of senior-friendly, nutritious foods. Using Instacart (a local, online shopping service that hires community members to pull and deliver grocery orders placed online), we set up recurring, “contact-less” grocery deliveries twice monthly for these senior citizens through June 30, 2020. (Instacart drivers simply leave the bags of food where they are directed to on the date and during the window of time provided. The seniors can pick the items up outside their front doors, on their porches, or wherever they designate.)

Because none of us lives by bread alone, we also came up with a way to provide friendly support and encouragement to these seniors as well—from a distance. In an email blast, we asked for club members to step up and “adopt a senior” during these challenging times. An amazing number responded within just a few hours, offering to mail cards, notes, and perhaps a small gift or two (Sudoku books, WordFinds, mints, crosswords, magazines, flavored teas, hand lotion, etc.) to their assigned senior in the coming months while social distancing is the norm. Most importantly, we asked these volunteer “RotaBuddies” to call their senior regularly, especially after their scheduled Instacart food deliveries to make sure all went well.

Quite a few of our members with younger children were eager to adopt a senior as a family to help their own kids understand the importance of coming together in hard times. (I imagine many carefully colored pictures will be sent to these seniors in the coming months, thanks to these little helpers—who will never forget the fact that they were able to be of service during an event that will no doubt be talked about for generations.)

Thanks to the kindness of our members and the generosity of this community (who have enthusiastically supported our major fundraiser, the Leprechaun Luau®, for almost 10 years), Food & More deploys this week.

We will get through this if we work together and refuse to let the extraordinary circumstances we're living in these days limit our ability to serve!