

“OUR CENTRAL DUTY:” COLLEGE PARK ROTARY CLUB RUNS ERRANDS FOR THOSE IN NEED

By Lyna Bentahar, Eric Neugeboren and Jonathan Tercasio, The Diamondback Staff, April 16, 2020 [Excerpted]

For years, Lisa Ealley and her team of volunteers at Meals on Wheels talked about how many senior citizens the group could serve before they would need to start a waitlist for eligible clients.

But since conditions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have worsened nationwide — keeping many Americans shuttered in their homes and in need of food deliveries — the local nonprofit group has tossed out that idea altogether. The volunteers decided they couldn't leave anyone behind, according to a letter Ealley wrote to the College Park City Council.

With many residents now hesitant to leave their homes, organizations in College Park — both new and more established — have stepped up to the plate. Though some have begun serving food to older residents and others have offered assistance in completing daily tasks, they share the same goal: making sure people stay safe.

“It's a necessary thing that needs to be done, and somebody's gotta do it,” said Ealley, chairperson for Meals on Wheels of College Park.

For \$5 every day, the program delivers three meals — breakfast, lunch and dinner, along with some snacks — to senior citizens in College Park and other areas in northern Prince George's County. And since elderly people are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, demand for these meals has doubled since the outbreak, amounting to about 150 clients, Ealley said.

Volunteers now have to wear gloves and masks while making deliveries, Ealley said. And inside the kitchen, surfaces are sanitized twice a day, she added.

Jim Hartsock, 84, said he's thankful for

the College Park organization's efforts. Meals on Wheels has been a great help to him and his son over the past seven years, he said.

“It's a good program, it really is,” said Hartsock. “They've been in business ... a long time, and they've got a good reputation here.”

Nomie Hamid, President of the Rotary Club of College Park, a humanitarian service organization, knew in early March that the pandemic would soon reach his community in Maryland. Preparations needed to be made to accommodate the increased demand for help, he decided.

With the help of College Park Rotary Club members, members of the greater Rotary District for central Maryland and Washington, D.C., and non-Rotary volunteers, Hamid set up a hotline that members of the community can call to ask for help picking up groceries or completing other tasks. Over 300 volunteers help answer the calls, complete jobs for those who dial in and spread the word about the hotline.

All volunteers for the hotline wear masks and gloves and leave groceries at the caller's doorstep. The club is also preparing a training video for volunteers who are making deliveries.

“Every man needs to give back — at the minimum — what they were given in this world,” Hamid said. “It's our central duty as human beings to make sure we help the people around us and to help make a difference.”

Over the three weeks the hotline had been up and running, the response has largely been positive, Hamid said.

“Thank you so much,” Hamid recalled those over the phone saying. “Because we didn't know where to go. We didn't know who to contact. We're scared to even exit the house, to go to the grocery store.”



[Above] Nomie Hamid, the President of the Rotary Club of College Park and the owner of Krazi Kebab, set up a hotline so that members of the community could call in for aid with groceries or other tasks during the coronavirus pandemic. (Julia Nikhinson/The Diamondback)