

# A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF MISSOULA AGING SERVICES

# 2025 CONNECTIONS

WINTER

## "I just want to keep getting stronger."



### From Meals on Wheels to Community Table, Meeting Changing Needs

When Paul Barnes talks about life in Missoula, he speaks with gratitude—for the organizations that helped him rebuild stability, and for the chance to give back in meaningful ways.

Barnes grew up in Chicago, but his Montana roots run deep. His mother was born in Malta, and he spent summers on a ranch on the Hi-Line. At 17, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served during the Vietnam War. **The GI Bill helped Barnes become the first in his family to earn a college degree.**

Barnes moved to Montana to join his family, but after his father's death, a series of hardships brought him to the Poverello Center, where he found the Housing Montana Heroes program. He quickly regained his footing, and began giving back. **He volunteered in the Missoula Senior Center, cooking five days a week for two years.** Long days on a hard kitchen floor became impossible, but Barnes gives back in a role on the Poverello Center's Board of Directors, where he uses his lived experience to advocate and improve services for unhoused veterans.

This past February, Barnes faced another challenge when **a bone infection necessitated the amputation of his right leg.** While he adjusted to his prosthetic, Barnes says he "had a real hard time getting around," especially for grocery shopping, and felt "pretty isolated." Through Missoula Aging Services (MAS), **Meals on Wheels helped on both fronts until he was strong and mobile again.**

These days, Barnes goes out to join neighbors for lunch instead—through MAS's expanded Community Table program (see page 8). He's enthusiastic: "My favorite pop-up was held at the new and improved Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation," he says. **For Barnes, the meals and the social connections have helped him stay steady through life's transitions and continue moving forward with strength and purpose in the community he calls home.**

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## Connect, Listen, Innovate Strength in Times of Transition



**Change is a constant** in all of our lives,  
and what defines a community is how we  
respond to it.

I'm inspired by the many ways families,  
partners, and neighbors are adapting  
with creativity and courage. **Each day,**  
**we see people embracing new ideas, new**  
**spaces, and new ways of connecting –**  
not to replace what came before, but to  
strengthen what matters most.

At Missoula Aging Services, **we're listening closely to what older adults tell us they need, so that we can lean into each moment of transition with that same creative spirit.** We're trying new approaches, testing solutions, and building on what works. Innovation means finding practical, meaningful ways to support belonging and independence.

Across the community, small shifts are adding up: conversations that open new doors, shared meals that build confidence, and forward-thinking approaches that help older adults stay rooted in place. **These moments remind us that resilience grows when we are willing to collaborate, and to imagine what's possible.**

**Thank you** for being part of this work. Your engagement helps shape a Missoula where people of every age can thrive, even – and especially – in times of change.

**Lisa Sheppard**

Chief Executive Officer

7,000

TOTAL  
INDIVIDUALS  
SERVED IN FY 2025

130,081

MEALS  
SERVED

27,481

CALLS  
ANSWERED

21,882

VOLUNTEER HOURS  
LOGGED



# Meals on Wheels behind the scenes

## THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The volunteer Meals on Wheels Advisory Council supports and strengthens the critical program. This group of volunteer drivers meets quarterly, offering strategic guidance, expertise, and advocacy. The council represents the voices of volunteers and clients and provides input on program decisions to ensure the program effectively meets community needs.



(Above, L to R) MAS Nutrition Program Manager Dean Thompson, Clayton Burtsfield, Vanessa Fitzgerald, Linda Hall, Amanda Ellaboudy, Greg Superneau, Nutrition Program Specialist James Gleixner, Richard Blank, and Community Services Director Ria Overholt. Not pictured are: Erika Sylvester, Mary O'Connell, Belva Burtsfield, Bill Lowney, and Joyce Stevens.



**VOLUNTEER POTLUCK** We celebrated Meals on Wheels volunteers over tables overflowing with garden produce and homemade treats. We hope this September potluck becomes a cherished tradition—filled with laughter and lasting friendships.



(Above) Belva Burtsfield brought homemade MOW-themed cookies to share.

(Below, L to R) MAS staff with volunteers and their families at Lindborg-Cregg Memorial Field: Lance Collister, MAS Nutrition Program Specialist James Gleixner, Paul Gjording, Connie and Dave LaVaute, and Karen Orzech.



# Missoula Villages

## Neighbors helping neighbors

Imagine a community where older Missoulians live life on their own terms—connected, supported, and empowered. That vision inspired a group of neighbors to create something extraordinary: a local Village modeled after the national Village to Village Network.

**A Village is more than a program; it's a movement.** It helps members age in place by weaving together volunteer support and trusted services. Need a ride to an appointment? Help with errands? Assistance with home projects? Or maybe just a friendly chat over coffee? A Village makes it possible. Members pay modest dues and actively participate, creating a network that fosters independence and combats isolation.

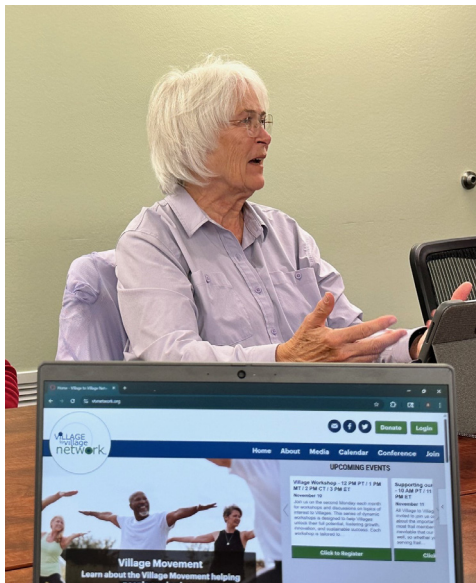
**What makes this model unique? Shared community.** Every member has something to offer, whether it's driving someone to the doctor, swapping a favorite recipe, giving tech tips, or simply listening. Picture this: a retired teacher edits a member's annual family letter, while that member lends a hand with yard work. These exchanges build dignity, purpose, and connection. Support flows both ways, so members feel empowered.

This approach is simple yet transformative. It taps into what we all crave: **connection, belonging, and continuity—a bridge between cherished memories and the future we envision.** By focusing on neighbors helping neighbors, Missoula Villages defines aging as a time of contribution, growth, and joy.

And this is just the beginning. Outreach activities and materials will launch in January 2026,



*Steven Gaskill, Village Advisory Council Member*



*Linda Torma, Village Advisory Council Member*

*(Continued on page 5)*



*(Continued from page 4)*

offering opportunities to learn more and get involved. If you believe aging should be vibrant and community-driven, this is your chance to help shape that future. Watch for more information on our website and our social media.

**Join us in building Missoula Villages and changing the paradigm of aging.**

## Spending Time, Sharing Interests



At Missoula Aging Services, Nancy Kral carefully matches individuals in the **Caring Companion** program. Mary Dunham (left) and Will Sebern (right) share a love of birding, music on vinyl, and more. Dunham, a Quaker and a teacher, spent much of her life in New Mexico. Her two sons are extremely important to her, so she moved to Missoula to be close to one of her sons and his family. Sebern worked in nonprofits for decades before relocating to Missoula when his wife took a job at University of Montana. The two spend time together conversing in Dunham's home, identifying the birds that flock to her feeder, tackling technology together, and going out for meals, record shopping, and other forays.

Sebern was looking for a way to give back that fits his flexible schedule and Kral quickly paired him with Dunham. Success!

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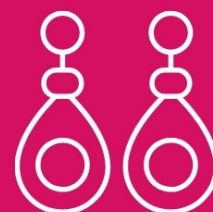
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**THE WEAR-IT-AGAIN**  
*jewelry* SALE

**GIVE YOUR OLD JEWELRY  
 A NEW LIFE!  
 DONATIONS SUPPORT  
 MAS PROGRAMS!**







*During a recent pop-up at the Montana Natural History Center, Jackie Walker (left) and Marguerite (Jo) and Donald Shattuck (right) visited and lunched on sandwiches and salad from Tagliere Delicatessen before hearing from a museum employee and exploring the exhibits.*

# The Community Table

## NEW! Pop-Ups and Restaurant Options!

Since Missoula Aging Services (MAS) launched the new, expanded Community Table in August, older Missoulians have enjoyed **5,856 meals at participating local restaurants and Missoula Senior Center**. Nineteen pop-up gatherings have also brought people together for good food *and* learning, everything from card-making and immersive tours at the Missoula Butterfly House & Insectarium to sessions on pain-management and fraud-prevention.

MAS Program Coordinator Tammy Gates is always on the run, liaising with partners throughout Missoula and joining participants for lunch. Gates says, **"At every event, I witness strangers becoming friends.** These moments remind me of the acceptance, love, and gratitude that make Missoula such a special place to live."



*Tammy Gates and Judy Wright.*

The Community Table program offers nutritious food and meaningful connections. **Many participants live alone, have lost a partner, and report feeling lonely.** Community Table offers a simple but powerful boost: a shared meal.

**Independence and choice are the foundation of the Community Table.** Catered pop-ups at destinations

*(Continued on page 9)*



*(Continued from page 8)**Erin O'Connor and Carl Sievers.*

like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation spark learning and connection, and restaurant options add flexibility.

SoupFarm owner Carl Sievers describes the partnership as an extension of his family circle: "I see the program as a way for people to get out and about . . . We all have older loved ones. My mom has always been the one to take care of our older family members. Now as she's getting older, it's our turn to help out. **We really value family and a sense of community.**"

Each week, Erin O'Connor (82) goes out to lunch with other participants who live in her building.

"One of the things I've experienced is joy for my neighbors," she says. "Those of us who drive now take other folks out to lunch, and it makes me happy for them and for our community because **it becomes a real bonding experience.**"

As the program grows, one truth is clear: when older neighbors share food and conversation, they're building a strong, connected community that benefits us all.

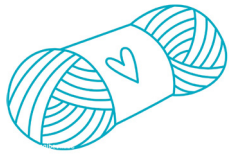


## Find Out More!

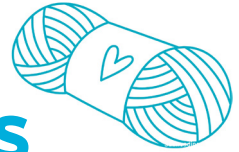
Are you worried about an older neighbor or loved one who might find it difficult to keep up with nutritious meals? Shopping and cooking can be difficult when aging impacts mobility. Call MAS to ask about Meals on Wheels eligibility.

*Meals on Wheels volunteer Linda Hall preparing to deliver meals on a snowy day.*





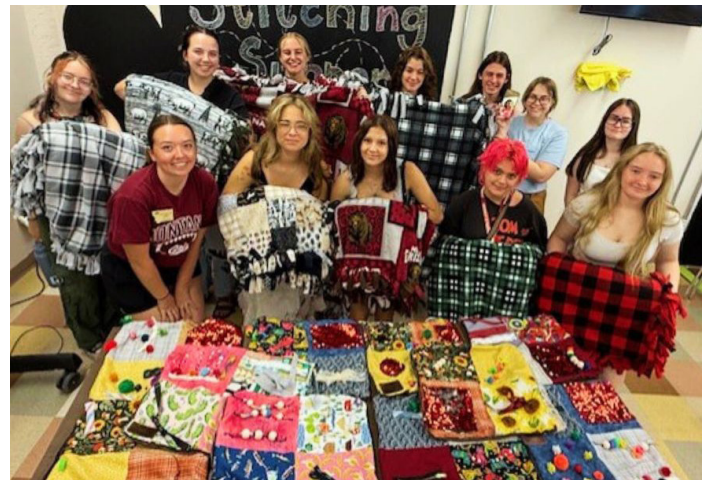
# Crafting Kindness Across the Generations



## University of Montana “Big Sky Experience”

University of Montana welcomed freshmen with the award-winning “Big Sky Experience,” designed to help build connections in their new community. Some new students made cozy blankets for older Missoulians in a crafting project led by the UM Student Makerspace.

MAS Community Services Director Ria Overholt spoke with students about supporting older neighbors, then the group (center) got creative with stacks of warm, bright fleece fabric. The first blanket went to Nan Barber (top). Nan receives Meals on Wheels, and she communicates with MAS staff frequently. Nan loves to offer a warm hug, so we hoped the homemade blanket would be like a warm hug from the MOW team.



## Hats for Head Start

We're grateful for the work Child Start Inc. Head Start does in Missoula to nurture and prepare preschoolers and grateful for the MAS volunteers who spent the year handcrafting fun hats to keep them cozy this winter! Volunteers Marguerite Shattuck (left) and Annabelle Hacker (right) joined MAS Volunteer Coordinator Judy Douglas (center) for the annual celebration at Missoula Manor.





# MAS Staff News

We are thankful for our talented, dedicated staff. They are the heartbeat of every service we proudly deliver to our community!

## NEW STAFF

We welcomed **EMILIE CULVER** to the team in September as **Statewide Senior Medicare Patrol Director**. A licensed clinical social worker with diverse experiences in human services and abuse prevention, Culver is a valuable asset to older adults across the state.

**LORI MARKOVICH** joined MAS in August as **Resource Specialist**. With a background in social work and customer service, Markovich brings knowledge and compassion to her role advocating for older adults and connecting them with supports that make a difference in their daily lives.

**EMMA PARTEN** came to MAS in September as a University of Montana practicum student before accepting a position on the Care Management Team as a **Care Navigator** in October. Parten's passion for working with older adults was sparked when she volunteered as a hospice companion before pursuing her degree in social work.

## YEARS OF SERVICE MILESTONE

### JUDY DOUGLAS

### Volunteer Coordinator

### 10 Years

If you've volunteered for MAS, chances are, you worked with Judy Douglas during your volunteer intake. For the past 10 years, Douglas has worked diligently to place each volunteer with a position that aligns with their interests. Douglas' meaningful matches have created long-lasting volunteer partnerships and we are thankful for her hard work over the years.

## PROMOTIONS & POSITION CHANGES

We are excited to announce that **STEFNI GURR** has been promoted to Office Manager! This year, Gurr earned her Professional Administrative Certificate of Excellence and completed management training while providing outstanding support to our clients and staff. Gurr's dedication, skill, and positive energy will make a great impact in her new role.

We are pleased to share that **EMILY LANDSIEDEL**, Development Officer, is now leading our Development Department. Since joining MAS in 2023, Landsiedel has worked tirelessly to strengthen donor relationships, lead fundraising campaigns, and take on grant writing with creativity and efficiency. Her dedication and leadership have kept our fundraising efforts thriving and we look forward to all she'll accomplish in the coming year.

## RETIREMENT

After nearly 11 years of dedicated service, **CYNTHIA WOOD** is retiring from her role as **Facilities Manager**. Wood has been our problem solver, organizer extraordinaire, and master of keeping things running like clockwork. We'll miss her warmth, humor, and steady hand. We celebrate Wood's contributions and wish her the best in her well-deserved retirement!

