

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF MISSOULA AGING SERVICES

2025 CONNECTIONS

SPRING

Nurturing the Heart of Home

Meals on Wheels Brings Security to the Vasquez Family



Anita, Rose, and Frank Vasquez at home together.

Meals on Wheels delivers more than just nutrition—it brings peace of mind, allowing Missoulians to feel secure in their homes. Frank and Rose Vasquez, both in their 90s, benefit from the program alongside their 66-year-old daughter, Anita. Thanks to Meals on Wheels (MOW), the family continues to live together, knowing that they have nutritious meals and a friendly check-in rain or shine. The program is a source of stability that connects the Vasquez family to a community that cares.

Frank and Rose met in the early 1950s at a school dance in Milwaukee. Rose was studying to become a teacher, and Frank was in medical school. “She was interested in me, so I became interested in her,” Frank jokes. They married in 1956 and raised five children together.

Frank, 96, retired after a long career as a psychiatrist. He

has always loved opera and time on the water. As an artist, Rose sold her drawings and woodcut prints. Now 91, she spends her days reading. “At my age, you do what you need to do, and that’s hard enough,” she says. Anita loves nature and photography; physical challenges prevent her from cooking the family’s meals.

Cooking became difficult for the family, so they turned to Missoula Aging Services (MAS) for help. “You want to have a decent meal on the table for your family,” Rose explains. “I needed help.” Meals on Wheels also provides social connection, and freedom from worry. Anita says, “It’s not just the meals. There’s the socialization and comfort. I can see my mom feels more secure knowing there will be a meal.”

MOW drivers bring joy and reassurance. “They’re all smiles!” Frank says. Rose appreciates someone is looking out for them: “They come to the door, so if something has gone wrong, somebody would know.”

Anita praises MAS for its personalized care. “You check in with us,” she shares. When the family needed adjustments to make Frank’s meals easier to chew, the nutrition team made it happen. MAS now provides additional in-home care to help with tasks of daily living.

Without Meals on Wheels, Frank, Rose, and Anita agree that they would be facing far greater uncertainty and stress. “It’s good to feel more comfortable, more at ease in living,” Frank reflects. Rose urges others to support this vital service: “You might be supporting part of your family, your parents, or grandparents. Everybody, when they get older, is going to need some kind of help.”

Last year, MOW provided more than 123,000 meals to help people across Missoula County like Rose, Frank, and Anita live independently with dignity and confidence. In these uncertain times, your contribution matters more than ever. Thank you for making a difference—one meal, one connection, and one act of kindness at a time.

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Standing Together for Older Adults



At Missoula Aging Services, our mission has always been to support older adults and their caregivers with essential services that promote independence, dignity, and well-being. Recent executive orders from the Trump Administration have raised widespread concerns about the future of federal funding for these critical programs.

While the courts have temporarily halted the initial federal funding freeze, the situation remains fluid. **The White House has signaled that a broader review of federal programs—**

including those supporting older adults—will proceed as planned, which could lead to funding cuts or policy changes affecting the services many older Montanans rely on every day.

This challenge comes as we observe March for Meals, a month dedicated to raising awareness and support for the Meals on Wheels program, which provides nutritious, home-delivered meals to many of the most vulnerable older adults in communities nationwide. **We've already heard from clients who are deeply worried, some calling in distress over the possibility that meals and other vital services could be taken away.** While we remain committed to uninterrupted support, advocacy is crucial in the months ahead to protect funding for the Older Americans Act and other federal programs that sustain the crucial work of Area Agencies on Aging, including MAS.

We encourage you to contact our elected officials and express how important these programs are. Even the possibility of funding reductions has caused significant stress for the older adults and their family caregivers who rely on our services. By reaching out, you can help ensure they continue to receive the care and support they deserve.

Contact your elected officials today:

📞 Senator Steve Daines - (406) 549-8198

📞 Senator Tim Sheehy - (202) 224-2644

📞 Congressman Ryan Zinke - (202) 225-5628

Your voice matters. Ask our Montana leaders in Washington to protect older Montanans by protecting the programs that make it possible for them to age safely and with dignity in their homes and communities.

Thank you for standing with us and with our older family, friends, and neighbors in Montana and beyond.

Lisa Sheppard

Chief Executive Officer



Giving Older Adults a Voice in the Legislative Process

At Missoula Aging Services (MAS), we believe that advocacy is one of the most powerful catalysts for meaningful change. Every older adult deserves to be heard, and ensuring their voice is represented in the legislative process is critical to shaping policies that uphold dignity, promote independence, and guarantee access to essential services.

As Chair of the MAS Advocacy Committee, I have seen firsthand how funding and policy decisions profoundly impact the lives of older adults and family caregivers. **Whether it's securing vital funding for home and community-based services, safeguarding access to healthcare, or addressing critical housing and transportation needs, advocacy is essential to improving the quality of life for aging Montanans.**

MAS proudly collaborates with organizations throughout the aging sector to drive change at the state and national levels. We educate our community on key issues, mobilize robust support, and engage directly with legislators to ensure that decision-makers understand the challenges faced by those we serve.

In February, MAS representatives participated in Fighting for 50+ Day at the Capitol, hosted by AARP Montana. We dedicated the day to meeting with lawmakers and Governor Gianforte and passionately advocating for crucial issues: Medicaid expansion, presumptive eligibility for Medicaid home and community-based services to reduce wait times, increased funding for Area Agencies on Aging like MAS, and property tax relief.

Advocacy is not just the responsibility of organizations—it's a call to action for all of us. Your voice matters. By staying informed, reaching out to elected officials, and sharing your experiences, you help build a future where every older adult can thrive.

I invite you to learn about how you can get involved by visiting missoulaagingservices.org/advocacy or by reaching out to our team directly. Together, we can make a difference.

Cynthia Rademacher

Board Member, Missoula Aging Services

Missoula Aging Services Named Employer of Choice!

We are thrilled to share that Missoula Aging Services has been selected as the recipient of the 2025 JSEC Employer of Choice Award in the Medium Business Category! This prestigious recognition highlights our unwavering commitment to fostering a positive, supportive workplace and reflects the dedication of our incredible staff who make MAS a great place to work every day.

This recognition affirms the value we place on both our employees and the community we serve. We are honored that JSEC has recognized MAS as an employer that prioritizes workplace culture but also makes a meaningful impact beyond our doors.



Adapting to Live Fully and Independently

Rick Hodges Urges Older Adults with Disabilities to Seek Missoula Aging Services Support



Rick Hodges at home.

At 62, Richard “Rick” Hodges fills his days with positive action, from building relationships in his neighborhood to painting and art to home DIY projects. Hodges is forward-thinking and determined to make the most of life, in spite of serious health challenges. Hodges advocates for independence, especially for older adults with disabilities. **He credits Missoula Aging Services with helping him maintain his autonomy.**

Originally from Eureka, Montana, Hodges’s early years were filled with work and travel. He joined seismic crews and worked in underground-locating before he married and settled into millwork. Then, Hodges was struck by non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. The disease led to loss of mobility, necessitating use of a wheelchair. Hodges has had to adapt.

When Hodges moved Missoula, he needed help with Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and local transportation. “The paperwork was too much,” he recalls. Missoula Aging Services became his go-to resource. **“It’s one call that makes your life simpler. . . . I just call you up and say, ‘What’s my next move?’”**

Hodges explains. **From energy assistance programs to health insurance, MAS ensures Hodges has access to the resources he needs to live independently.**

Hodges purchased a mobile home that he has been fixing up. He added weatherproofing and a ramp for his front entrance. Sandy Anderson, one of MAS’s volunteer “Snow Angels,” clears the ramp after snowstorms so delivery drivers can safely bring groceries. Anderson says, **“Rick instantly won me over with his infectious love for art. . . . He is a joy to talk to and I’m excited to hear more from him about his life.”**

Hodges emphasizes that MAS is not just for people in crisis—it’s for anyone looking to stay independent and secure their future. “People shouldn’t have too much pride to call Missoula Aging Services,” he says. “They take away all the stress of figuring things out on your own.” For those who might be hesitant, he urges: **“Don’t struggle alone. Missoula Aging Services is there to guide you. They’ll help you get the benefits you need so you can focus on living.”**

(continued on the next page)



Sandy Anderson, 66, enjoys outdoor activities and volunteering. Anderson says, “I love to help people who just need a little assistance to stay independent.” Anderson believes giving back enriches both giver and receiver: “You receive more than you ever give.”

Volunteer Joe Gresham “Pays It Forward” To Help His Older Neighbors Age in Place

Kathleen Kimble and Bill Fleischman turned to Missoula Aging Services (MAS) in 2024, using Meals on Wheels for three months to help them through a difficult period. Kimble says, “It can be a lot of standing effort to do meal prep seven days a week, especially for a couple of seniors with health challenges.” The couple have since used MAS programs to help with outdoor tasks. Volunteer Joseph Gresham clears snow for them. “Without Joe, we’d be in both physical and financial danger,” Kimble shares.

Gresham, 30, is an attorney and enjoys fly-fishing and “playing golf poorly.” He values the opportunity to help, saying, “It provides volunteers like myself with a sense of community and an opportunity to make someone’s day. Win-win.” Gresham sees MAS programs as “an integral part of the Missoula community.” He believes that, “Having the Cleanup Crew available to help community members maintain their homes and property when financial resources or health limitations are obstacles is incredibly important.”

Kimble expresses gratitude and hopes Missoulians will continue to support MAS. “The meals, yard help, and snow removal help will be essential to my family,” she says. “We want to live in our home for the rest of our lives.”



(Continued from page 4)

Rick values the sense of community he’s found in Missoula, from MAS’s support to building friendly relationships with neighbors. “I’m the guy who waves at everyone, pets all the dogs, and gets people talking,” he says. He started painting and helps others explore creative outlets. He gives materials to friends to make art for him, “but they always end up wanting to keep their own work because it turns out too good!”

It’s on his “bucket list” to develop a small electric car he’s designing into a small business. Also on his bucket list—paragliding off Sentinel this summer. Hodges always looks forward to new endeavors. He refuses to dwell on the negatives: “I don’t know what’s next, but I’m going to take advantage of every second.”

For those considering donating to Missoula Aging Services, Hodges has a simple message: “The entire community is stronger when everyone has the support they need.”

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(continued on the next page)

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2025 MARCH FOR MEALS

Thank you to our March for Meals partners
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**MAY 17,
2025**



Spring Updates From the Resource Center

Medicare Advantage (MA) Enrollment Period, January 1 - March 31: New coverage begins the first of the month following enrollment. MA beneficiaries can:

- Make changes to their coverage.
- Switch to another MA plan.
- Switch back to Original Medicare and standalone Part D.

Medicare General Enrollment Period, January 1 - March 31: People can enroll in Medicare Part A and Part B. Coverage starts the month after you sign-up. This enrollment period is for individuals that missed their initial enrollment period and do not qualify for a special enrollment period. If you do not qualify for a special enrollment period, you might have to pay a monthly late enrollment penalty.

Montana Elderly Homeowner/Renter Tax Credit: Folks can receive a refundable credit up to \$1,150.00 for paying their rent/property taxes. Elderly Montana homeowners or renters (age 62 or older) may qualify for this credit even if they do not have to file an income tax return.

Eligibility:

- 62 years of age or older as of December 31, 2024.
- Lived in Montana for at least nine months.
- Rented, owned, or leased a home in Montana for at least six months.
- Have a total household income of less than \$45,000.



Chris Hightower
Resource Specialist Supervisor

Our resource specialists are happy to help folks navigate these systems!



Engage Missoula



<https://www.engagemissoula.com>



Did you know you can keep up with current City of Missoula projects on Engage Missoula? Engage Missoula is the City's online engagement platform. We know your comments help us make better decisions and design better projects, so we want to make that easy. By using Engage Missoula, you can learn about projects, contribute your ideas, and ask questions at times that work best for you! You can also find out about upcoming in-person events and other ways to get involved.

On Engage Missoula, you can read about current City projects like Our Missoula: Growth Policy & Update & Code Reform; the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, & Trails master plan; and more! Check it out, sign up for updates, and find ways to make your voice heard at <https://www.EngageMissoula.com>.

MAS Staff News

As the Missoula Aging Services team continues to grow, so does our capacity to deliver the programs and services our community has relied on for over 40 years. This winter, we proudly welcomed five new team members, celebrated a significant Years-of-Service milestone, and recognized one well-deserved promotion.

SAHNA BALLEK has dedicated the last nine years to working with individuals facing Severe and Disabling Mental Illnesses (SDMI's) in our community. She joined MAS as a Care Manager specializing in Memory Care in December 2024, where she applies her extensive experience to support and enhance the lives of those in her care.

MELANI BEST joined the Resource Specialist team in November 2024 as the Rural Resource Specialist in Seeley Lake. Prior to serving clients at MAS, Melani was the Office Manager and I-Ride Coordinator for the Seeley Lake Community Foundation. Her experience working with people to improve quality of life in the Seeley-Swan Valley makes her a wonderful addition to the Resource Specialist team. Clients in the Seeley-Swan may call our office to schedule an appointment with Melani.

AMY BREMNER was welcomed to MAS in February 2025 as the In-Home Services Program Manager. Before joining MAS, she worked in academia and small business administration, assisting departments with growth and supporting the community. The skills she brings to the In-Home Services Program are vital to supporting our community's growing need for in-home services.

TAMMY GATES joined the Nutrition team at Missoula Aging Services in February 2025 as our Congregate Meal Program Coordinator following a 35-plus-year career in Early Childhood Education. Tammy believes that building strong relationships is the key to providing quality service, and her experience serving vulnerable populations will help us as we work to expand our Congregate Meal Program throughout our communities.

CARRIE O'HERRON joined our agency as Ombudsman Program Specialist in February 2025. An experienced healthcare worker and patient advocate, her ability to build alliances and protect the rights of residents living in long-term care makes her an exceptional addition to the Ombudsman team.

YEARS OF SERVICE MILESTONE

At Missoula Aging Services, we appreciate the incredible work our staff does every day. We simply couldn't do it without them! This winter, we proudly celebrated the following Years of Service Milestone. Congratulations!

CYNTHIA WOOD

Facilities Manager

10 years

PROMOTIONS & POSITION CHANGES

CHRIS HIGHTOWER was promoted from Resource Specialist Team Lead to Resource Specialist Supervisor in January.

EST. 1982

MISSOULA *aging* SERVICES

WE'RE PROUD *of* OUR YEARS

337 Stephens Ave | Missoula, MT

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MAS Events

IN-PERSON NEW TO MEDICARE WORKSHOP

Wednesday, March 26, from 12 to 1:30 pm.

Wednesday, May 28, from 12 to 1:30 pm.

Missoula Aging Services

337 Stephens Ave., Missoula, MT 59801

Register online: <https://medicaremas.eventbrite.com>

VIRTUAL NEW TO MEDICARE WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 26, from 6 to 7:30 pm.

Register online: virtualnewtomedicaremas.eventbrite.com

IN-PERSON GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

Wednesdays from 11 am to 12:30 pm, March 19 - April 23.

Facilitated by Partner's Hospice.

Missoula Aging Services

337 Stephens Ave., Missoula, MT 59801

Check in at the front desk when you arrive. No cost.

IN-PERSON MATTER OF BALANCE

Wednesdays from 1 to 2:30 pm, April 2 - May 28.

Missoula Public Library

301 E. Main St., Missoula, MT 59802

Register online: MatterofBalance-MAS-2025.eventbrite.com

VIRTUAL CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS

Second Monday of each month from 4 to 5 pm.

Third Tuesday of each month from 1 to 2 pm.

Participate online using Zoom. No cost.

Register online: <https://bit.ly/2YkyVPU>

IN-PERSON CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS

Fourth Wednesday of each month from 2 to 3 pm.

Missoula Aging Services

337 Stephens Ave., Missoula, MT 59801

Check in at the front desk when you arrive. No cost.

VIRTUAL MEMORY LOSS CONVERSATIONS

Thursdays from 10 to 11 am. New attendees welcome!

Participate online using Zoom. No cost.

Facilitated by Dementia Friendly Missoula.

Register online: <https://bit.ly/3ITnAsY>

IN-PERSON TECH CAFE

First Monday of each month from 1 to 3 pm.

Missoula Aging Services

337 Stephens Ave., Missoula, MT 59801

Check in at the front desk when you arrive. No cost.

View a full list of events at MISSOULAAGINGSERVICES.ORG