

OPINION > LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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TOUCHING MANY LIVES

I recently reviewed the coverage of Meals on Wheels and the Trump administration's budget. But then I also encountered obituary after obituary with phrases like: "volunteered for decades for Meals on Wheels" and "recognized for his volunteering with Meals on Wheels" and "for many years she drove for Meals on Wheels." And I only got through the obituaries from the last two weeks!

I know from my work — with nonprofit organizations that provide support to older adults who desire to age in the homes and communities they love — that thousands of people volunteer every year to deliver a meal, a well-being check and a smile to their neighbors in Ramsey County. But to know how important Meals on Wheels is to these volunteers that it deserves mention in the final published words honoring their lives is striking.

When I think of Meals on Wheels, I think first of the older adult who has difficulty preparing the meals she enjoyed years ago, or finds himself with a budget so limited that a hearty daily meal doesn't seem possible. Meals on Wheels addresses their daily need for good nutrition and goes beyond that. I know from research that Meals on Wheels decreases the rate of falls, which cost our nation \$31 billion each year. Also, the cost to provide Meals on Wheels to a senior for one year is roughly the same as one day in the hospital or 10 days in a nursing home.

I remind myself, though, to not forget the impact Meals on Wheels has on the rest of us. The cost-effectiveness of the service means prudent use of the taxes I pay. Knowing that my aunt has a daily check-in offers peace of mind, and possibly an early intervention if there is a more serious issue. And based on the final tributes to those recently passed members of our community, Meals on Wheels touches the lives of many seeking ways to give of themselves to ensure a vibrant community for all of us.

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The writer is executive director of Senior Services Consortium of Ramsey County, a collaboration of organizations providing Meals on Wheels and other services to older adults.