

Husband, wife bond while helping Meals on Wheels

Richard Gross thinks golf is a good activity for a couple to do together. His wife, Lois, added "and Meals on Wheels." Although she has no interest in golf, the 78-year-old has a 33-year vested loyalty to the program which delivers hot and cold meals to senior citizens who have difficulty cooking, getting to the grocery store, and who have no one to do it for them.

"The good Lord means for this program to go," said the bright-eyed Mrs. Gross, who serves on the board of directors and the Council of Sites of Meals on Wheels. The program must be very organized, she said.

As the responsible party for beginning the Glen Burnie kitchen in 1976, the parishioner of Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie considers herself a professional volunteer.

"We've become old people serving old people," said Mrs. Gross, who, with her husband, has six children, 27 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Mr. Gross is a substitute driver one-three times per week. In his 2002 tan Ford Crown Victoria, he packs in the containers holding two meals for each client as he travels on three routes with a Meals on Wheels "visitor" within a 15-mile radius.

The visitor takes in the food, checks on clients and unobtrusively observes physical conditions and surroundings. Any concerns are reported to the site. Mr. Gross has driven for Meals on Wheels since his retirement in 1990 as president of a tugboat company where he worked for 43 years. Sometimes he serves as driver and visitor simultaneously when volunteers are light.

"Sometimes I'm the only person they see all week," said the 78-year-old.

Meals on Wheels' clients pay fees based on their ability to do so, and some government money is allotted for the program, although the Mr. and Mrs. Gross feel it is never enough.

“It’s a very little bit of money for all the clients we have,” said Mrs. Gross, with daily clients numbering between 100 and 110. Individual donations help keep the program afloat, too. Mr. and Mrs. Gross are part of a base of 70 regular volunteers at the Glen Burnie site; they promote the private, nonprofit volunteer-based organization to solicit others.

“This keeps the elderly out of nursing homes and senior housing,” said the healthy-looking senior, as he left for a round of golf.