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For Immediate Release

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Meals on Wheels, Watertown Urban Mission Merger to Build on Long Records of Success in Northern New York

Northern New York Community Foundation, United Way of Northern New York Each Pledge Financial Support Partnership Expected to Provide Stability for Meals on Wheels Program, Improve Outreach for Urban Mission

WATERTOWN (February 9, 2015) – Meals on Wheels and the Watertown Urban Mission announced today that they will merge services, making the Meals on Wheels program the seventh major program within the Watertown Urban Mission.

“The food and companionship delivered by Meals on Wheels is critically important to so many of our neighbors and a partnership with the Watertown Urban Mission will keep this program strong,” said Judy Drabicki, Meals on Wheels Board of Directors officer. “We reached out to see if this was possible because the Mission’s presence in the community and the success of its campaign have demonstrated that it is an organization perfectly suited to ensure the stability of Meals on Wheels for many years to come.”

“Meals-on-Wheels” delivers quality, nutritionally balanced meals to people in need, specifically those at risk of, or experiencing hunger. Generally the program provides food and companionship to those who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals. The volunteer drivers bring food to homes and apartments in the city of Watertown, as well as within up to a five-mile radius of the city. The program delivered its first meal in Watertown on May 13, 1968

“In many ways, this is a perfect fit for both the Watertown Urban Mission and Meals on Wheels,” said Erika Flint, executive director of the Watertown Urban Mission. “It is amazing for us to take on a program which has been run so well for so many years and help ensure it keeps going strong long into the future. For the Mission, this gives us an opportunity to work outside of our walls, reaching out into the community to meet needs and make a difference.”

To ensure that this merger of two nonprofits is successful, both the Northern New York Community Foundation and the United Way of have pledged financial support for the merger and transition.

“The United Way of Northern New York supports this new partnership because these agencies can do more together than they could ever do apart,” said Bob Gorman, CEO of the United Way of Northern New York. “Our support to Meals on Wheels is evident in the fact that in the last decade alone, the United Way has provided Meals on Wheels with close to a quarter of a million dollars. Our board of directors today is expected to announce a decision that will ensure the Urban Mission has continued financial help from the United Way to make this transition work.”

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“The Northern New York Community Foundation has continually urged and encouraged organizations to explore ways to work together, not only for efficiency, but also for the positive synergy that such partnerships can create. Ultimately, we know all charitable dollars go further when organizations work collaboratively. We want to send a strong message of our belief in this type of thinking by committing \$25,000 towards the transition,” said Rande Richardson, Community Foundation Executive Director. “We feel this is a strategic investment in two organizations we've had a long history of support for, collectively nearly \$300,000, and whose missions are both so vital to the citizens of our area.”

While the partnership created by Meals on Wheels and the Watertown Urban Mission will not be finalized until later in 2015, the two organizations will begin immediately to intertwine services. Meals on Wheels will keep Donna White as the head of the program, maintain contracts with the Samaritan Keep Home for food preparation, and continue existing volunteer arrangements. It was Mrs. White's mother-in-law, Irene Orloff, who started Meals on Wheels in Watertown.

“I am grateful to the United Way, Northern New York Community Foundation, Samaritan Keep Home and Watertown Urban Mission for this opportunity, and I look forward to a mutually-beneficial, long-term relationship,” said Mrs. White. “In this merger with the Watertown Urban Mission, I feel grateful for the opportunity to continue our service to our clients uninterrupted, with the added benefit of a partnership with an organization that has served Watertown and the surrounding area for many years. The Mission shares our commitment to help those in need.”

The Watertown Urban Mission's role will be to oversee the program, provide organizational support in the short and long term, and help provide value added services, including but not limited to care packages for those in need of clothing or other material items the Mission could provide.

“When the Meals on Wheels Board of Directors and I first considered a collaboration with the Watertown Urban Mission, I had concerns about Meals on Wheels losing its own unique identity,” Mrs. White said. “However, we are not losing our identity, but gaining a worthwhile partnership in the fight against hunger—as well as contributing to an individual's ability to remain independent in the comfort of their own home.”

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