



247 Factory St., Watertown, NY 13601 — (315) 782-8440 — (315) 782-8441
www.WatertownUrbanMission.com & www.Facebook.com/YourMission

For Immediate Release

Contact Tobi Darrah, Director of Development

The Watertown Urban Mission's Meals on Wheels Program Receives \$500 From Meals on Wheels America to Support Client Pet Support Program

Much-Needed Funding Helps Keep Greater Watertown Area Seniors and Their Pets Together

WATERTOWN (June 24, 2016) – Knowing that seniors with pets are 36% less likely to report loneliness and have 21% fewer doctor visits*, Watertown Urban Mission's Meals on Wheels program is proud to announce that it has received a \$500 grant from Meals on Wheels America to support its client pet support program. Funding will be used to provide food, supplies and care for Meals on Wheels clients with pets – all of which can be financially and physically burdensome.

"Pets are a source of joy and companionship for our elderly, disabled, and ill recipients, who often live alone and are not physically able to prepare their own meals, much less get out of the house to socialize," said Joanna Loomis, executive director of the Watertown Urban Mission. "By contributing to the health and happiness of our recipients' pets, this funding helps ensure our recipients themselves are happy and healthy."

In total, Meals on Wheels America has granted \$300,000 to 162 local Meals on Wheels programs through the *Meals on Wheels Loves Pets* initiative this year. Funding is made possible in part through a donation from Banfield Charitable Trust (BCT), who in October of 2015, handed over all funding and grants administration responsibilities for their popular Pet Assistance Grant Program to Meals on Wheels America. To date, the grant program has distributed more than \$2.1 million in funding and pet food donations to over 300 local Meals on Wheels programs across the nation.

"The *Meals on Wheels Loves Pets* initiative is just another way that Meals on Wheels can deliver so much more than just a meal," said Meals on Wheels America President and CEO Ellie Hollander. "Through grant funding, educational opportunities and in-kind donations for our member programs, we hope to grow current pet programs and help those looking to start new ones."

This funding will allow the Watertown Urban Mission's Meals on Wheels program to be able to provide approximately 650 total pounds of pet food for around 20 pets of current recipients.

About the Mission's Meals on Wheels Program

The Meals on Wheels program delivers quality, nutritionally balanced meals to people who are largely shut in their homes and at risk of hunger. By providing a warm meal for lunch, a bagged meal for dinner, and a daily visit, the program and its volunteer drivers make a direct impact on the lives of your neighbors in need. The local program depends on community donations and volunteer support to ensure low cost preparation and delivery of more than 3,000 nutritious and delicious meals each month.

About Meals on Wheels America

Meals on Wheels America is the oldest and largest national organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based programs across the country that are dedicated to addressing senior isolation and hunger. This network exists in virtually every community in America and, along with more than two million staff and volunteers, delivers the nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks that enable America's seniors to live nourished lives with independence and dignity. By providing funding, leadership, education, research and advocacy support, Meals on Wheels America empowers its local member programs to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time. For more information, or to find a Meals on Wheels provider near you, visit www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org.

**Sources: Stanley, I. H., Conwell, Y., Bowen, C., & Van Orden, K. A. (2014). Pet Ownership may Attenuate Loneliness Among Older Adult Primary Care Patients Who Live Alone. Aging & Mental Health, 18(3), 394-399. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2013.837147>; Siegel, J.M. (1990). Stressful life events and use of physician services among the elderly: The moderating role of pet ownership. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58, 1081-1086.*

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