

Resources

By Patti Atkins

The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington's Caregiver Corner

Fill up on food, friends and fun at Luepke Center

At the Luepke Senior Center in Vancouver, you will find more than 80 people having lunch on Mondays and Wednesdays in the Meals on Wheels People dining center. It's a lively place where people make lifelong friends and fill up on a well-balanced, delicious meal designed to meet the nutritional needs of an older adult.

"Where else can you eat for a small donation and have a great lunch?" asks Teckla "Teckie" Shaylor, who has been coming to the center for over 10 years. "And the friends I've made here are my family. We celebrate birthdays and holidays together and check on each other."

She and her friends always sit at the same table, which is full of fun and laughter. They call it Teckie's Table; before that it was Tony's Table. As she introduces everyone at the table, she says that Mike Oppe is the "baby" of the group at age 70, and he helps anyone there who needs assistance getting their tray to the table or an extra cup of coffee.

Teckie says that they often go to water aerobics together as well as to movies on "Tightwad Tuesdays," and they meet up for dinner on Fridays. During the COVID-19 shutdown, the friends met for picnics in the park outside the center so they could continue to keep up with each other.

The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities funds meals programs like this in five Southwest Washington counties. In Clark County, the agency works with Meals on Wheels People to deliver the meals in dining centers like the Luepke Senior Center, or via home delivery for people who are homebound. MoWP takes donations for the meals, but no one is turned away for an inability to pay. Dining programs are also located in Washougal, Amboy, La Center and Ridgefield.

The centers often offer entertainment, music and activities to help older adults find and maintain social connections. Volunteers Evelyn Hallett, 98, and Sandi Scott decorate Luepke Center and keep the atmosphere fun and lively.

The National Institute of Aging recently published research that shows the significant value of connections like these. While everyone has an innate need for meaningful social engagement, it plays an even more vital role in older adults' quality of life. Consistent social connection can keep older adults physically, emotionally and mentally fit, and leads to better long-term health outcomes.

As adults grow older, staying socially active does not happen naturally on its own. Commitment, support and diligence are required to foster meaningful connections. The people at Teckie's Table intuitively know this.

For more information on Clark County dining centers and home-delivered meals, call the Aging & Disability Resource Center at 360-694-8144 or email ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov.

And if you are looking for a great restaurant in Clark County, try The Diner, which is run by MoWP. This innovative restaurant has a great

menu and helps fund programs for Meals on Wheels. You can find The Diner at 5303 E. Mill Plain Blvd., Vancouver. Be sure to bring a friend!

Patti Atkins is communications coordinator for the Area Agency on Aging & Disability of Southwest Washington. For information, visit www.helpingelders.org.



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