



The Diner
Promising Practices from the Network
July 20, 2020

The Diner is a casual dining experience with a mission to nourish seniors through food and socialization. Located in Vancouver, Washington, The Diner is one of several [social enterprise](#) activities of Meals on Wheels People, Inc. a non-profit senior nutrition program funded through the Older Americans Act (OAA) and community support. The Diner acts as a local service provider and supports the mission of Meals on Wheels People through delicious restaurant meals for eligible Vancouver adults ages 60 and older. The program also provides additional revenue from private pay diners who are not eligible for OAA but enjoy the tasty food.

Opened by Meals on Wheels People in February 2019, The Diner offers classic breakfast and lunch options in an atmosphere accented with “retro nostalgia”. The Diner encourages intergenerational social interaction by welcoming a diverse crowd of people – individuals, families, business professionals and older adults alike. The concept is simple but meaningful: the profits from The Diner help offset the cost of providing nutritious meals to Vancouver’s 60-and-over population.

The Diner serves delicious meals to their general public patrons as well as a menu consistent with the nutrition and contribution requirements of the OAA for adults age 60 and beyond. The OAA menu choices at The Diner follow the standard fare but are modified by a Registered Dietitian to meet one-third to one-half of the older adult’s daily nutrition requirement. Senior diners are encouraged to contribute voluntarily and confidentially whatever amount they choose. No one is denied service (at The Diner, congregate sites or home-delivered meals) if they cannot or choose not to contribute.

Other social enterprise activities of Meals on Wheels People include a commercial foodservice kitchen for business and community catering. Also, the kitchen operates the Meals 4 Kids program in the Portland metropolitan area, which is funded through a Portland City levy and delivers nutritious meals, milk, bread and fresh fruit directly to the homes of families in need.

Additional questions? Please contact Julie Piper Finley, Director of Marketing & Communications at The Diner. She can be reached at 503.953.8136 (p) or 503.318.1362 (c) or julie.piperfinley@mowp.org.

SOCIAL DISTANCING PIVOT

The Diner, like other restaurants, was faced with closure during COVID-19, and their only source of revenue was take-out service. Clients were growing at Meals on Wheels People; numbers surged from 5,000 clients to 8,000, and the much-needed revenue contributed by The Diner disappeared. But with a little creativity and thought, the staff rose to the occasion with a new concept. The Diner decided to offer Family Meals. A complete meal for four can be purchased for just \$39.99 with additional portions available for \$9.99. Family meals include Portobello and Pesto Pasta, Smoked Kielbasa Sausage with German Potato Salad, Roasted Meatloaf with Mashed Potatoes and Gravy, Homemade Chicken Pot Pie and Curry Chicken Stew.

In addition to family meals, The Diner actively markets promotions. They are active on social media with a presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Postings and tweets from The Diner inform the Vancouver community about special events and offerings. For example, on Mother's Day, The Diner promoted coffee cake and homemade pies for sale as a special treat for Mom. National Grilled Cheese Sandwich Day was celebrated on social media to generate interest and motivate patrons to order take-out. When toilet paper was in high demand, The Diner used their excess supply of toilet paper to generate take-out sales. A free roll of toilet paper was included with every meal ordered as a way to increase sales. The Diner has created opportunities to increase sales while in the middle of a national crisis.

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