



### **Meals on Wheels Expansion:**

For hundreds of elderly Houstonians *the wait is over*

By: Herb Orrell, IM Volunteer

It's been estimated that over the span of a lifetime, each of us will spend nearly three years simply *waiting*—in traffic, at the grocery store, doctor's office, the ATM; or now, thanks to the cell phone, virtually anywhere: "Can I put you on hold?"

Mostly, waiting is a short-lived inconvenience that pretty much resolves itself and then we get on with our lives again. But imagine another kind of waiting: Imagine you're elderly and isolated, you can't cook for yourself and what you're waiting for is a phone call that will help end your hunger—a

*lifeline* that will help soften your isolation. And imagine that you've been waiting not for a few minutes or even an hour or two, but for *an entire year*. This has been the case for hundreds of Houstonians waiting to be served by IM's *Meals on Wheels for Greater Houston*.

But that's about to change. Because of the new MOW expansion fueled by a 1.4 million dollar grant from the Texas Department of Agriculture called "Texans Feeding Texans," hundreds more Houstonians will finally get the phone call they've been waiting for: *the wait is over*—help is on the way.

### **Setting the Stage for Expansion**

Why did MOW receive such a generous grant? Was it reputation, trust, accountably? Yes...but that's not the whole story.

It could be said that the stage was set almost three years ago when the organization began to ask new questions about the role MOW could play in serving the nutritional needs of elderly Houstonians. As David Roberts, Director of Senior Services puts it, "We stopped accepting the belief that the mission of MOW should be limited to the stewardship of government funding and starting asking a bigger question: How do we address hunger in Houston?"

Coming to this understanding—that before you can expand what you do, you have to expand what you *believe* you can do—was a turning point for the organization. With this new belief—this *inner expansion*—the floodgates began to open that would lead to the dramatic *outward* expansion of the program.

The first step in expanding the program was to provide additional services to current clients (for many seniors, the delivered hot meal was their only nutrition for the day.)

Generous contributions by congregations, corporations, foundations and individuals allowed MOW to begin providing breakfast and weekend meals.

By partnering with the Houston Food Bank, MOW began offering frozen meals as a temporary bridge for those waiting for delivery of daily hot meals. Finally, MOW began the “sponsor-a-senior” program where individuals can donate \$1200 to feed a senior for an entire year. Sybil Dunaway, Director of Client Services, says the sponsor program, along with the other initiatives have been a tremendous success reducing the number of seniors on the waiting listing from 1,000 to now under 600.

This latest MOW expansion, made possible by the “Texans Feeding Texans” grant, will enable MOW to serve as many as 600 additional seniors; taking them off the waiting list and onto daily delivery routes.

To meet these needs, four new trucks and three new staff drivers are coming into the fold. Case Assessors are working overtime to qualify the additional seniors and MOW staff is frantically reworking delivery routes and addressing other logistical concerns so that by mid June we will serve almost 4,000 seniors daily.

Waiting—it’s part of life for each of us. But waiting for food shouldn’t be part of anyone’s life. If you have contributed to MOW, we are very grateful for your support. If not, and you’d like to join us in telling more seniors that help is on the way, give us call—*what are you waiting for?*

*Meals on Wheels for Greater Houston* is a 2008 recipient of the Feinstein Challenge. Each donation we receive during March/April will help us receive a larger share of the \$1,000,000 Feinstein giveaway. Visit us online, [www.houstonmealsonwheels.org](http://www.houstonmealsonwheels.org), or fill out the enclosed envelope to make your donation today.