

SPRING 2022

Junctures



Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.



**Walkathon
returns to May
Page 4**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Mountain Empire
Transit offers new
ways to ride, Page 8

Community
nutrition sites
reopen, Page 12

Program helps
seniors become tech
savvy, Page 14

Age-Old Values For All Ages

CONTENTS

- 2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**
MEOC growing along with community's needs
- 4 EMERGENCY FUEL FUND**
Program assists region's elderly with emergency heating costs; Annual Walkathon returns to May
- 7 PHARMACY CONNECT**
Program provides prescription drug assistance to all ages
- 8 METGO! & METLINK**
Transit offering new ways to get where you need to go
- 10 MOUNTAIN EMPIRE PACE**
FAQs about the Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly
- 12 NUTRITION SERVICES**
Community sites open after area COVID cases decline
- 13 IMPROVING MEAL DELIVERY**
New freezer trucks mean more efficiency for meals program
- 14 SENIOR TECHNOLOGY CAREER SUPPORT**
Program helps older adults become more tech savvy
- 15 JOY FOR ALL**
Robotic pets visit nutrition sites
- 16 OLDER WORKER AWARD**
Morris receives 2021 Mae French Award for role at Mountain Laurel Center
- 17 GRACE P. DAVIS AWARD**
Cunningham recognized for kindness, work ethic
- 18 REMEMBERING JANIE DOCKERY**
MEOC family mourns loss of children's services director
- 20 OTHER HAPPENINGS**
Golf tournament set; AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers needed
- 22 iSIPsmarter PROGRAM**
UVA research study aims to reduce sugary drink consumption



Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. was organized in 1974 and is designated as the area agency on aging and public transit provider for Wise, Lee and Scott counties and the City of Norton in southwestern Virginia. In addition, MEOC directs Mountain Empire PACE, Healthy Families for Southwest Virginia, the Mountain Laurel Cancer Support and Resource Center and the Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center.

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MEOC Board of Directors meets the third Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October and December at 10 a.m. at MEOC's administrative office building, 1501 3rd Ave. E, Big Stone Gap, Va.

MEOC Advisory Council meets quarterly on the second Thursday of March, June, September and December at 10:30 a.m. at MEOC's administrative office building.

HOW TO REACH US

Main office

Physical address: 1501 Third Ave. E.

Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Phone: 276-523-4202

Mountain Empire PACE

Physical address: 1508 Third Ave. E.

Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Phone: 276-523-0599

MEOC Transit

Physical address: 1503 Third Ave. E.

Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Phone: 276-523-7433

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

MEOC growing along with community's needs

The first quarter of 2022 is over, and Mountain Empire Older Citizens has much to be excited about. MEOC continues to grow along with the community's increasing needs and your support. We are excited as programs and events return to traditional formats and schedules after weathering many changes over the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are very excited to announce that the Walkathon will be back to its regular schedule on May 1. The pandemic shifted the 2020 event to a virtual format and moved the 2021 Walkathon to late August. However, the event is back on track this year and will be held on the first Sunday in May.



MICHAEL WAMPLER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Walkathon is the biggest annual fundraiser for the Emergency Fuel Fund for the Elderly, a program that annually helps about 1,000 older adults in MEOC's service area pay emergency heating expenses during winter. What is extraordinary about this fund is that it exists entirely because of community support. The program receives no state or federal money. You can find all the details about the Walkathon on Pages 4-5. We hope to see you there!

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Mountain Empire Transit is thrilled with the tremendous success of METGo!, a new ride-share service in Norton and Wise, since its launch in late June 2021. METGo! is free to the general public, so the service is accessible to all within its service zone. Learn more about METGo! and another new transit service, METLink, on Pages 8-9.

MEOC's home-delivered meals program has also experienced tremendous growth. Last year, the nutrition department provided over 138,000 meals and recently added two specialized trucks, allowing for more efficient meal delivery. Read the full story on Page 13.

Throughout this newsletter, you'll find more news and information about other MEOC programs and services. Our staff remains focused on serving those who need help and support in the community. If you or someone you know needs MEOC or MET services, please don't hesitate to give us a call.

'It helped me so much'

Emergency Fuel Fund assists elderly during coldest months

Living on a fixed income, 96-year-old Magdalene Stipe says increased heating expenses in the winter means if she pays her electric bill, she may have to do without something else she needs.

So she was appreciative when her MEOC personal care aide told her about the Emergency Fuel Fund for the Elderly. "I was so thankful she told me about it," said Stipe. "It helped me so much. It paid the biggest electric bill I had during the winter. That meant I could still buy other things I needed. And I told my neighbor about it too. She's 88, and she was able to get help too. It was such a big help," Stipe said.

Stipe has lived in Big Stone Gap all her life and in her current home since 1964. She was married to her husband Ernest for 31 years before his death 40 years ago. They had two children, one of whom is deceased. Before her vision failed, Stipe loved reading her Bible and was a Sunday school teacher for 20 years. Stipe continues to live independently in her own home and has a close group of family and friends who keep a close check on her.

She is just one of nearly 1,000



Ninety-six-year-old Magdalene Stipe of Big Stone Gap is among the nearly 1,000 older residents in the region who was helped by the Emergency Fuel Fund for the Elderly last winter.

older adults in MEOC's service area who were assisted by the Emergency Fuel Fund this past winter. "Ms. Stipe and others like her are why the fuel fund exists," said MEOC Emergency Services Director Marsha Craiger. "The Emergency Fuel Fund for the Elderly is one of MEOC's longest-running programs and has assisted our region's most vulnerable residents for decades. The program

is remarkable because it is funded entirely by community donations," Craiger continued.

The bulk of those donations is made during MEOC's largest annual fundraiser, the Walkathon. This year's event is set for Sunday, May 1. This will be the 46th year the Walkathon has taken place. The walk will begin at 2 p.m.

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at Big Stone Gap's Bullitt Park and proceed along the Greenbelt Trail. Registration will start at 1 p.m. The rain date is May 15. The Walkathon is returning to its traditional spring date after the 2021 event was held in late August.

The fundraising goal is \$165,000, and the community's support is needed to reach it, said Craiger.

"We are asking everyone to come out, enjoy the day with us and support this worthy cause. The Emergency Fuel Fund is truly the community's fund. Every cent that has been spent to help someone comes from the heart and generosity of someone else. We were fortunate to surpass our goal last year, and we hope to do so again this year," she added.

MEOC Executive Director Michael Wampler is glad to see the Walkathon returning to the first Sunday in May after the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the 2020 event to virtual and moved the 2021 event to a late summer date. "We are excited to be back on track and hosting the Walkathon in May. The Walkathon is MEOC's biggest annual fundraiser for the Emergency Fuel Fund, and we are grateful to everyone who supports the cause. We look forward to seeing everyone there," said Wampler.

The Emergency Fuel Fund for the Elderly is one of MEOC's longest-running programs and has provided assistance to our region's most vulnerable residents for decades. The program is remarkable because it is funded entirely by community donations.

— Marsha Craiger, MEOC Emergency Services Director

MORE ABOUT THE EMERGENCY FUEL FUND FOR THE ELDERLY

Who it helps: The fund assists low-income seniors in Lee, Scott and Wise counties and the City of Norton.

What it does: The program pays for wood, coal, propane, heating oil or electric bills for those who are at least age 60 and whose income is at or below 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines.

Where the funding comes from: The fuel fund is supported solely by donations from businesses, churches, civic groups, local governments and individuals. The program receives no state or federal money. No administrative costs are paid from it. **EVERY SINGLE PENNY** goes to help a local older person.



PARTICIPATE AS A WALKER. Contact MEOC at 276-523-4202 to request a pledge form and begin collecting pledges. Raise at least \$100 to receive a Walkathon T-shirt.



DONATE. If you can't attend the Walkathon, but still want to help, you can donate in multiple ways.

- Visit www.meoc.org and click "Donate."
- Text DONATE to 276-242-3525.
- Mail a check to MEOC, P.O. Box 888, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219.



SPREAD THE WORD. Everyone can help by talking about the event on social media and asking family, friends and neighbors to support it too.

Thank you!

2021 Walkathon CORPORATE SPONSORS



**MID-ATLANTIC
CSE AGENCY**

ABINGDON, WISE, BRISTOL VA/TN, JOHNSON CITY

BalladHealth
It's your story. We're listening.



a PPL company





Anna Duncan, 91, is among thousands of individuals who receive free or low-cost prescriptions through Pharmacy Connect of Southwest Virginia each year.

Program helps cover medication costs for all ages

Ninety-one-year-old Anna Duncan is uncertain how she would pay for some of her needed medications without assistance from Pharmacy Connect of Southwest Virginia.

The free program saves her about \$1,500 monthly in prescription medication costs, she said. Duncan, a Lee County resident, is among thousands of individuals who receive free or low-cost prescriptions through Pharmacy Connect each year. The program serves the uninsured and under-insured of all ages in the counties of Lee, Wise, Scott, Dickenson, Buchanan, Tazewell and Russell and the City of Norton.

Duncan maintains a healthy lifestyle, prioritizing a healthy diet and regular exercise. She stays busy too. Quilting, crocheting, cooking and gardening are among her hobbies. Duncan has an extremely

positive outlook and says she has a strong prayer life. Her motto is, "Make every day count."

Duncan does have some health problems, however, including diabetes and heart problems. Cost of medications to treat those issues prompted her to contact MEOC for assistance through Pharmacy Connect.

Duncan enrolled in Pharmacy Connect in 2009 when she could not afford co-payments for her medications that treat life-threatening conditions, even though she had Medicare coverage. She currently receives three brand-name medications for free through the program, saving her about \$1,500 per month.

"It's the best program I've been in for assistance with medications," Duncan noted. "The staff is always supportive, and having access to these medications makes such a difference for me."

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Pharmacy Connect medication assistance caseworkers can access the free Indigent Patient Assistance Programs of more than 250 national pharmaceutical companies. For an individual to enroll in Pharmacy Connect, his or her physician must agree to participate.

Each pharmaceutical company has different eligibility guidelines, so all medications may not be available. It is not unusual for a person to have several different prescriptions from different pharmaceutical companies.

The medication assistance caseworker provides assistance with applications and other necessary paperwork. Participants must provide income verifications for each household member.

Medications are shipped to the participant's home or physician's office.

Pharmacy Connect of Southwest Virginia is a partnership including Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., Clinch River Health Services, Inc., Junction Center for Independent Living, LENOWISCO Health District, Stone Mountain Health Services, Inc., The Health Wagon, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and Virginia Health Care Foundation. MEOC is the administrator and fiscal agent for the partnership.

Ready to apply or want more information? Call MEOC Pharmacy Connect Assistant Coordinator Amber Dingus at 276-523-4202.

METGo! & METLink

Mountain Empire Transit offering new ways to ride

Mountain Empire Transit added two new options for riders to get where they need to go during the past year, including an innovative ride-share service and a shuttle route to the Tri-Cities of eastern Tennessee.

Like MET's traditional service, the new services are free to the general public of all ages.

METGO!

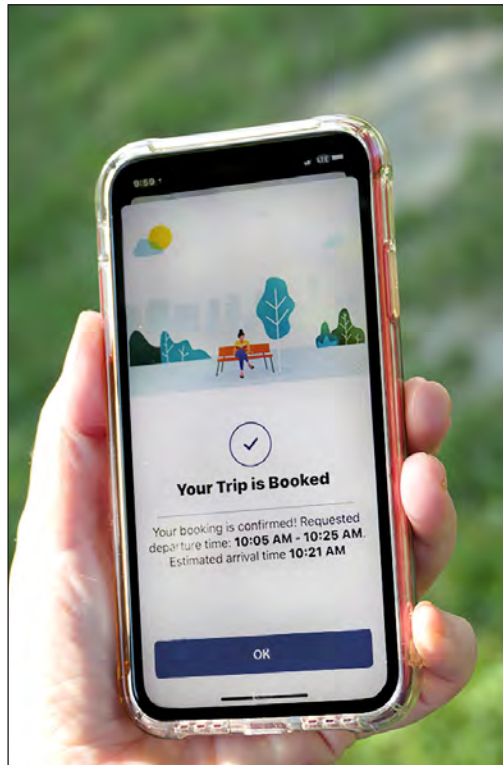
METGo!, Mountain Empire Transit's free, on-demand public transportation service in the Norton-Wise area, was launched last summer and has experienced great success during its first months of operation.

The METGo! zone has already expanded slightly from its original outline, and the service is transporting a daily average of more than 100 riders.

From its launch on June 28, 2021, through Feb. 28, 2022, METGo! provided 10,742 rides to about 14,920 people, exceeding expectations.

"We have been so pleased with the positive response to METGo!," said MET Director Mitch Elliott. "It has been even more successful than we anticipated. We believe this will be the future of transportation for us."

METGo! is part of a Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation pilot project funded



ABOVE: Kathy Still of Norton, former Director of News and Media Relations at The University of Virginia's College at Wise, was among METGo!'s first users when it launched last summer. She is pictured with driver Donnie Stidham on the UVa-Wise campus.

LEFT: METGo! rides are booked directly from a smartphone.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

with state and federal grants. If METGo! continues its success, Elliott hopes MET can eventually expand on-demand transit to other local communities.

METGo! trips are booked using a smartphone, similar to how Uber and Lyft work. You can hail a ride from anywhere within

METGo!'s designated 11-square-mile zone using an app developed by Via.

The METGo! zone stretches from Lonesome Pine Airport near the Town of Wise to the Dorchester community near Norton Community Hospital. The zone expanded slightly from its

original boundaries after several months of operation based on rider demand.

Download the METGo! app to see whether you are within its service area. Just search "MET Go" in the App Store or Google Play and tap the "download" icon.

Then create an account and follow the on-screen instructions.

METLINK

As part of another phase in MET service expansion, a connector route to Kingsport, Tenn., launched on Feb. 2, 2022.

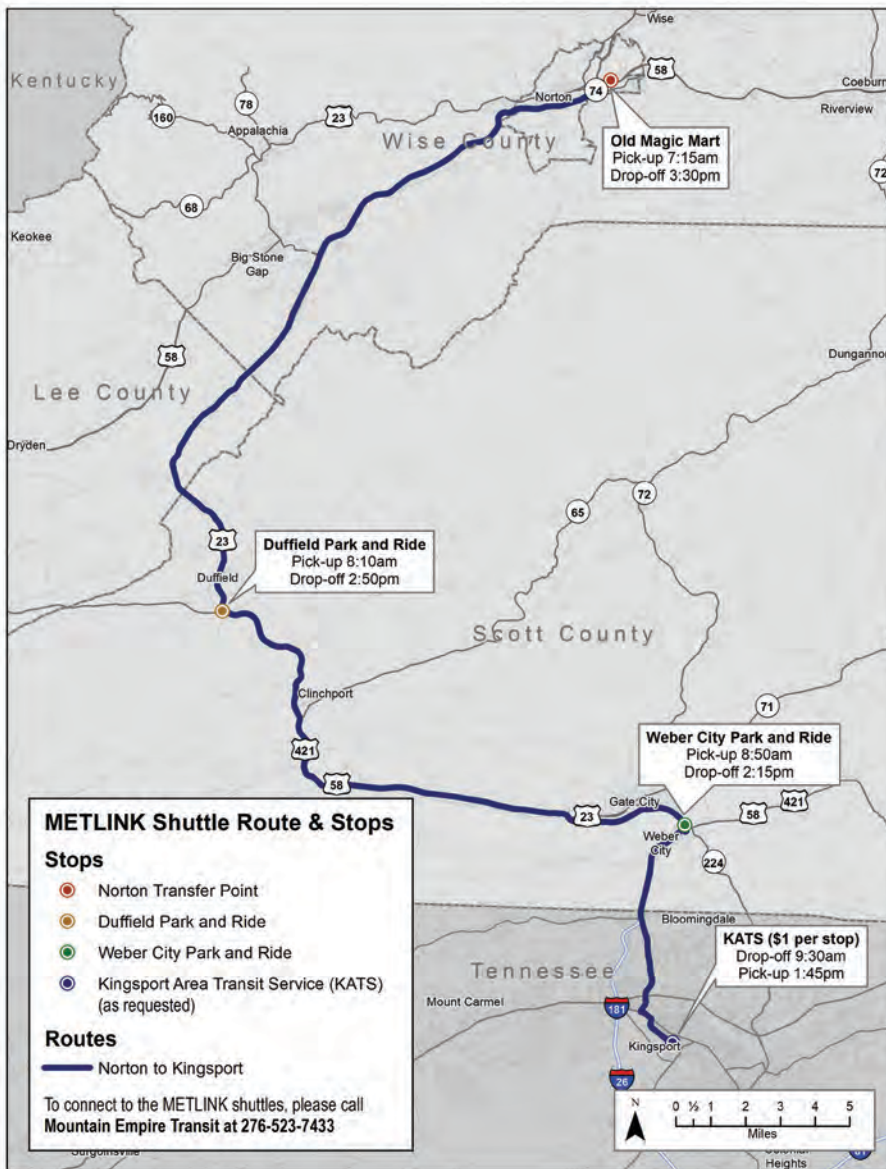
The new service shuttles riders from Lee, Scott and Wise counties and the City of Norton to Kingsport, Tenn.

Riders will have the option to stay on the METLink route while in Kingsport or transfer to the Kingsport Area Transit Service and use its fixed-route transit system. Riders can access medical facilities, dining and shopping opportunities, and more.

"Having a connector route to the Tri-Cities area has long been a need in our service area and something our riders have asked for," said Elliott. "The response has been great so far."

METLink shuttle connector locations include the Virginia-Kentucky Regional Shopping Center in Norton (off US 58 East), Duffield Park & Ride and Weber City Park & Ride.

METLink is free to the general public and open to all ages. KATS fares are \$1 per stop. METLink trips must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance by calling 276-523-7433.



METLink has three shuttle connector locations, one each in Norton, Duffield and Weber City.

PACE: Helping you remain at home while you age

I Frequently asked questions & answers

Are you an older adult who wants to remain independent and age in your own home but needs support to do so? Mountain Empire Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly may be your solution. PACE puts participants at the center of care, providing a comprehensive package of medical, wellness, social and support services. Following are some frequently asked questions and answers about PACE.

What is PACE? The Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly is a health and social service program that helps older people with chronic illnesses live independently in their own homes.

How do I qualify? You must be age 55 or older and live in Lee, Scott or Wise counties or the City of Norton. You must also be deemed eligible for nursing home level of care, which means you must need help with some of your activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, mobility, or toileting, as determined by local health department and social services professionals.

What are some of the services I will receive? A team of health care professionals will give you the coordinated care you need. Services include, but are not limited to:

- medical care specific to each participant's needs and preferences
- medical specialties such as audiology, dentistry, optometry, podiatry and speech therapy
- physical, occupational and recreational therapies
- meals and nutritional counseling
- home health and personal care
- all necessary prescription medications
- hospital and nursing home care when necessary
- adult daycare
- social services

Who pays for these services? Long Term Care Medicaid and Medicare. A worker can provide help with the applications and process.

Can I keep my home? Yes. PACE wants you to remain and live independently in your home with PACE services or help from your family.

Will PACE take my income from me? Long Term Care Medicaid allows you to keep your income up to \$1,388 per month for a single person.

Can I keep the aide I have now? PACE offers an opportunity for a caregiver of your choice to be employed by MEOC and provide your personal care needs in your home. MEOC pre-employment requirements must be met.

Do I have to attend the center daily? No. PACE is individualized care based on your need.

Will PACE pay for my medicine? Yes, as prescribed by our medical team.

How will I get there? Mountain Empire Transit provides door-to-door transportation.

What if I get sick or need the doctor? PACE medical staff is on call 24 hours a day every day of the year.

How do I obtain more information or start the enrollment process? Contact Intake and Enrollment Coordinator Cindy Fraley, RN, at 276-523-0599 or 866-793-7223.



Meet Your PACE Provider Team



Melinda Fleenor
FNP-BC

Pushkas Gopalan
MD, Internal Medicine

Melanie Wade
FNP-BC

Providing the CARE you need to maintain INDEPENDENCE in your own home

An alternative to nursing facilities, Mountain Empire Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly in Big Stone Gap is designed to help older adults remain independent and in their own homes as long as possible. From medical, social and emotional health, we provide a full spectrum of services.

Call today to learn more!
276-523-0599 or 866-793-7223



Community nutrition sites now open

All MEOC Senior Community Sites are now open after being closed during high COVID-19 case counts.

The sites reopened on April 4, returning to Phase III of a three-part plan following U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Virginia Department of Health recommendations.

Senior community sites provide a healthy meal in a community setting. The program is open to anyone age 60 or older living in Lee, Scott and Wise counties and the City of Norton. Also provided are nutrition assessments, nutrition and food safety education, and nutritional counseling.

MEOC community sites are located at Big Stone Gap, Coeburn, Pound, Norton, Hiltons, Nickelsville, Jonesville and Pennington Gap. All site meetings have returned to a regular schedule. Virtual meetings and home-delivered frozen meals are also available to those who don't want to attend in person.

MEOC Nutrition Services Director Carrie Stallard said many participants are excited to return to in-person meetings. "Everyone is excited to be able to gather in groups again and enjoy not just a hot meal but the socialization aspect. And for those who aren't comfortable with group settings, we still offer the option of virtual site meetings, which also provide a great opportunity to socialize and participate in group activities," said Stallard. (See more about how virtual meetings work in the box at right.)

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING PHASE III OF THE REOPENING PLAN

- Site meetings return to a regular schedule.
- All meeting participants must agree to temperature checks and to complete a COVID-19 pre-screening questionnaire.
- Masks **MUST** be worn but may be removed during meal service or while eating/drinking.
- Physical distancing requirements are lifted.
- Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer are strongly recommended. All sites provide access to handwashing facilities and hand sanitizer.
- Public trips and outings resume as normal.
- Guests and visitors are welcome at meetings without preapproval by the site manager.



HOW VIRTUAL CONGREGATE NUTRITION MEETINGS WORK

Virtual services are available for those who don't want to attend in-person community site meetings. Participants can connect via Zoom or through video chat. Virtual site meetings offer opportunities to socialize, participate in group exercises, receive nutrition and health information, and participate in games. Zoom meetings are held Monday through Friday, 9-11 a.m. If you don't have a computer or tablet, don't worry. The congregate nutrition program allows participants who have been active in the program for 90 days or more to check out a Birdsong tablet that can be used for virtual meetings, connecting with family members, assisting with telehealth and more. For those who don't know how to use Zoom, MEOC provides training on it and other video chat options.

- Participants have the option of hot meal service provided on site or continuing frozen, home-delivered meal service while funding is available.

Contact Stallard at carrie.stallard@meoc.org or 276-523-4202 to learn more about MEOC's congregate meals program.

New freezer trucks to improve meal delivery

Mountain Empire Older Citizens has added two new freezer trucks to its vehicle fleet that will allow the agency to be more efficient in meal delivery to the region's elderly.

Purchase of the trucks follows a year during which the agency served a record number of people through its home-delivered meals program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (VDARS) provided funding for the specialized vehicles.

"Even before the pandemic, we were in need of a specialized truck equipped to deliver frozen meals. However, the increase in demand made the need more

"Even before the pandemic, we were in need of a specialized truck equipped to deliver frozen meals. However, the increase in demand made the need more crucial."

— CARRIE STALLARD
MEOC Nutrition
Services Director

crucial," said MEOC Nutrition Services Director Carrie Stallard. "The new freezer trucks will allow us to better serve older adults in need of a nutritious meal," she added.

MEOC serves Lee, Scott and Wise counties and the City of

Norton, and many clients live in remote areas.

Stallard explained that the vehicles MEOC previously used for meal delivery were aging and ill-equipped for the surge in demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specialized blankets insulated meals during delivery. That limited the distance and time the vehicles could travel during a single delivery route, requiring frequent returns to the agency for restocking, especially during summer months.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many older adults who were already experiencing food insecurity became isolated at home. MEOC's eight congregate meal sites, where older adults could receive a healthy meal and nutritional education in a group setting, closed because of COVID restrictions.

So MEOC began providing emergency meals service to homebound seniors in addition to clients already receiving home-delivered meals. Thus, the number of people served by MEOC's home-delivered meals program increased dramatically. In 2021, MEOC served 131,474 meals to 1,258 older individuals in its service area.

Stallard said the new trucks can carry twice the number of meals as the previous delivery vehicles, saving time and reducing fuel consumption. The four-wheel-drive vehicles will also allow easier access to remote areas and offer safer travel during inclement weather.



Mountain Empire Transit driver Cody Davis stands with one of MEOC's new freezer trucks.

Program helps seniors become tech savvy

For older adults in need of technology training to improve work skills, MEOC's Senior Technology Career Support can help.

The STCS program provides technology training for income-eligible adults at least age 55 who are seeking employment. Working with community partners at the Regional Adult & Career Education Center and Virginia Career Works, participants attend classes to help develop work-ready computer skills. Seniors can attend in-person classes or study at home.

In addition to training, participants may receive a laptop computer and accessories designed to help make technology more accessible for seniors.

Frances Smith enrolled in the STCS program in May 2021 and completed the NorthStar Digital Literacy curriculum in August 2021. Classes were administered by a Regional Adult & Career Education instructor at the Center for Workforce Innovation in Appalachia. Smith has been a participant in MEOC's Senior Community Service Employment Program for four years. That program offers part-time community service training for adults age 55 and older.

Through the Senior Technology Career Support program, Smith received certification in digital literacy courses including MS Word, Excel and Power Point. "I have learned more about computers than I knew when I started the program," said Smith. "It helps me to do my job in the most efficient way possible. I met a lot of good people and made several lasting friendships," she added.

STCS participants are taught basic computer skills, internet basics, using email, Windows, Mac OS, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Docs, social media, information literacy, supporting K-12, career search skills, and the digital footprint.

For those who need additional assistance with reading or math skills, classes are available or one-on-one tutoring services may be requested. Participants receive support from teachers in class or by phone, text, Zoom and email.

Call 276-523-4202 or visit the 'careers' section at www.meoc.org to apply for the STCS program.



Frances Smith enrolled in MEOC's Senior Technology Career Support program last May and completed the NorthStar Digital Literacy curriculum in August.

SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Are you age 55 and older and looking for a part-time job but need training to enter or re-enter the workforce? MEOC's Senior Community Service Employment Program prepares eligible workers for unsubsidized jobs through training in community-based organizations.

SCSEP focuses on the needs of mature workers, the community and employers. Participants receive a stipend while receiving training, classroom experience, job search support and other individualized supportive services. Participants must also meet income requirements.

Call (276) 523-4202 to learn more.

Robotic pets visit community nutrition sites

Pets have been shown to reduce feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression, but not everyone can care for a traditional pet. However, some MEOC nutrition program participants had an opportunity to interact with a robotic pet aimed at providing the same comfort, joy and happiness as a real cat or dog without the responsibilities of caring for one.

The Virginia Assistive Technology System, a division of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, provided MEOC with two Joy

For All pets, a cat and dog. The robotic animals are used for group and one-on-one meetings where therapy animals may be beneficial. Therapy pets have been known to help with isolation and anxiety and depression, said MEOC Nutrition Program Director Carrie Stallard. For many people, however, pets can be expensive, difficult to care for and can cause falls, she noted. Robotic pets can be a good alternative.

The robotic animals contain sensors that respond to motion and touch. They have lifelike coats and

make authentic animal sounds. The pets have “bark and meow” technology to respond when they are petted or sense light or motion.

The robotic pets were introduced at MEOC’s Pennington Gap and Jonesville nutrition sites. Participants instantly fell in love with the pets, said Stallard.

“The participants commented on how much company the pet would be, especially for those who live alone. And the obvious benefit of not having to feed or clean up after it makes it the pet of choice!” she added.



Study evaluates apps to improve breast cancer patient mental health

The University of Virginia School of Medicine, in cooperation with the Cancer Support Community and Gilda’s Club, is seeking women ages 18 years or older with a breast cancer diagnosis in the last five years to join a clinical trial.

Participants will use confidential smartphone apps for eight weeks and complete online surveys at four different times during a 12-month period.

Participants will self guide through the easy-to-

use smartphone apps that teach skills for coping and improving wellbeing. There are no required visits to a clinic or a doctor’s office.

Participants who complete the study will receive up to \$200 in gift cards.

Visit www.arcstrial.org to submit an interest form to join the study. Contact the study coordinator at 1-833-762-0853 or arcstrial@virginia.edu for more information.



Dianne Morris (center) is the 2021 Mae French Outstanding Older Worker Award recipient. The annual award recognizes a Mountain Empire Older Citizens employee at least age 60 who demonstrates exemplary service, kindness and commitment in the workplace and community. With her are MEOC Executive Director Michael Wampler and Older Worker Program Director Carrie Stallard.

Morris earns older worker award for role at Mountain Laurel Center

As coordinator of the Mountain Laurel Cancer Support & Resource Center, Dianne Morris provided much-needed assistance to local cancer patients, whether by arranging liquid nutritional supplement deliveries, providing financial support to help with cancer-related expenses or presenting cancer-related education to the community.

However, Morris' commitment to the center, part of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., went beyond simply performing a

list of job duties. Because of her dedication and exemplary service, Morris is the 2021 Mae French Outstanding Older Worker Award recipient. She received the award just before her retirement at the end of January.

The annual award recognizes an older MEOC employee at least age 55 who demonstrates the qualities of service, loyalty, commitment and kindness in the workplace and community exemplified by the late Mae French. French became an MEOC employee in 1976 at age

81 through the Green Thumb Program. She worked at the agency's Norton nutrition site until an illness in 1993 forced her to retire at age 98.

MEOC Older Worker Program Director Carrie Stallard announced the award on Dec. 7, 2021. "Dianne is an amazing example of the soul and spirit of MEOC," said Stallard. "Dianne is a mentor and role model for coworkers and displays a work ethic and dedication that inspires everyone around her. Her gift to our community is much-needed resources and aid. Her gift to MEOC is her leadership, loyalty and commitment to helping others."

Morris was surprised but honored to receive the award. "It's a privilege to work for an agency and a program that does so much for so many in our community," she noted.

MEOC Care Coordination Director Judy Willis said that after Morris joined MEOC in 2018, she distinguished herself as dedicated to service and exemplified kindness in all she did.

"Dianne has, during her tenure, expended a tremendous amount of energy and time forming and strengthening connections in the community, both locally and in the cancer community statewide," added Willis.

Following Morris' retirement at the end of January, the Mountain Laurel Center welcomed Tiffany Jacobs as its new coordinator. Contact Jacobs at 276-523-4202 or tiffany.jacobs@meoc.org for more information about the center.

Cunningham recognized for kindness, work ethic

Personal care aide Doris Cunningham does not stop thinking about the clients she serves just because she's off the clock.

Cunningham wants to be sure they are cared for and their needs are met even when she's not working. For example, last Christmas, Cunningham was worried a client might not have a special holiday meal. So she prepared plates of home-cooked food, including prime rib, and hand delivered them to the client's apartment. But Cunningham also knew some of the client's neighbors would appreciate a hearty meal. She delivered meals to them too.

Cunningham's kindness is among many reasons she is the 2021 Grace P. Davis Award recipient. The award annually recognizes an In-Home and Family Support Services staff member who has shown dedication to MEOC's mission. The recipient must demonstrate compassion, concern and respect in providing services to frail older clients.

Cunningham, of Dryden, has worked at MEOC since October 2015. Those who nominated Cunningham for the Grace P. Davis Award cited her dedication to clients, strong work ethic and commitment to the agency as outstanding qualities.

"The pure dedication Doris shows toward her clients is something to be desired in all aides," one person wrote.

Another nomination reads,

in part, "Doris goes above and beyond for her clients. She is willing to fill in on a moment's notice. She never complains about her workload. Doris has been working overtime and seven days a week for some time now. She is very loyal and dedicated to her clients. Doris takes pride in her work and strives to do the right thing every time."

Cunningham was presented the award by MEOC Director of In-Home & Family Support Services Heather Oakes during a January 8 virtual staff meeting.

MEOC employees eligible to win the Grace P. Davis Award include those who provide services through the homemaker, personal care, adult day health care and/or respite programs. Family Support Services recipients, caregivers,

community members or any MEOC employee can make award nominations.

MORE ABOUT THE AWARD

The late Grace P. Davis was a retired Lee County educator who was instrumental in the organization of MEOC and provided invaluable leadership in its growth and expansion for 25 years.

Davis was a leading and outspoken advocate for developing in-home services for the elderly. She served on the local planning group that received the initial grant in January 1974 to establish MEOC and on the agency's board of directors through 1999, when she resigned at age 96 because of health problems. She passed away in September 2002.



Personal care aide Doris Cunningham (center) displays the 2021 Grace P. Davis Award. With Cunningham are MEOC Director of In-Home & Family Support Services Heather Oakes (left) and Supervisor Rebecca Gilly.

As leader of MEOC's Children's Services Department for nearly two decades, Janie Dockery was a fierce advocate for child abuse and domestic violence victims, a voice for the voiceless, a visionary and a mentor to many.

Dockery passed away unexpectedly on Jan. 31, 2022. She began working at MEOC in October 2003, directing the Healthy Families for Southwest Virginia program and later the Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center. Dockery's kindness and devotion to MEOC will be greatly missed.

Two of Dockery's longtime coworkers share the following tributes to her.



Janie Dockery

Dockery was a voice for the voiceless

BY LADONNA HALL

Director, Southwest Virginia CAC

On January 31, 2022, the world lost a God-loving devoted wife, mother, grandmother and aunt; loyal friend; and fierce advocate for domestic violence and child abuse victims. Janie Dockery spent most of her adult life working to be a voice for the voiceless. Her work in the state and community was well known.

Janie came to MEOC to continue her work with children and families. MEOC's KinCare program, which provides support to relative caregivers of children not living with their parents, began with assistance from the national Brookdale Foundation and continues due to Janie's dedication.

When MEOC, as part of a community effort, was interested in offering a child abuse prevention program, the Healthy Families program came to the agency. Even when funding was cut, Janie insisted on keeping the program alive. Healthy Families has now grown to the largest level of its existence.

Without Janie, the Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) would not be what it is, nor would the CAC movement be such a vital part of serving Virginia. She worked with the National Children's Alliance and the Children's Advocacy

Centers of Virginia to help this program grow. Janie was the keeper of the history of how CACs grew in Virginia.

Janie's tireless effort on behalf of children and families speaks for itself. She was a visionary but also attuned to the minutest of details. She was fierce, honest, kind, and giving. Janie brought a team atmosphere to the programs she directed. She met everyone where they were, pushed to make them better at their jobs, and inspired them to be better people.

I would not be the professional I am without Janie. More importantly, however, I would not be the person I am without her influence. Janie's friendship with and mentorship of everyone in the children's services family will be missed most of all!

A fierce advocate, leader and friend

BY MAGGIE GILBERT

Dickenson County CAC Satellite Manager & Healthy Families Family Support Worker Supervisor

Janie and I began working together in 2003, first in the Healthy Families program and in the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Children's Advocacy Center beginning in 2010. Janie's contributions as director of children's services are invaluable.

One of her most important roles was as a true advocate for the children of Southwest Virginia. She worked hard to establish, maintain and expand services for children and their families. Janie was outspoken and determined when it came to protecting children.

Janie could see the bigger picture and taught me the importance of thinking that way. She encouraged me to do things that she knew would help me grow personally and professionally. We shared times of struggles and growth working together in Healthy Families and the CAC.

Janie did not waiver during struggles and remained devoted to growing our children's services team. The department now has the greatest number of staff since the beginning of both programs. Janie's knowledge and experience in child abuse

One of (Janie's) most important roles was as a true advocate for the children of Southwest Virginia. She worked hard to establish, maintain and expand services for children and their families. Janie was outspoken and determined when it came to protecting children.

prevention and intervention services made this growth possible.

Janie was more than my supervisor; she was my friend. I consider myself blessed for having the opportunity to work with her for so many years. She will be missed and will always remain part of our children's services team.

Note: LaDonna Hall, former clinical services director for the Southwest Virginia CAC, is the new director of MEOC's Children's Services Department.



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Golf tournament proceeds assist cancer patients

The 11th Annual Harold Lester Memorial Golf Tournament is set for Friday, June 17, at Lonesome Pine Country Club, Big Stone Gap.

Proceeds will support the Harold Lester Memorial Fund of the Mountain Laurel Cancer Support and Resource Center of Mountain Empire Older Citizens.

The Harold Lester Memorial Fund provides direct help to cancer patients throughout the local community who are experiencing unexpected needs due to a cancer diagnosis. The fund was established a decade ago by Harold Lester's family in his memory after he lost his battle with cancer.

Mr. Lester was devoted to caring for and assisting thousands of people during his lifetime. He spent much of his life working with children and their families through his career in the Wise County School System, where he was a teacher, coach and administrator for more than three decades.

Those who knew Mr. Lester remember a man with a strong Christian faith and a belief that one needs to take care of family, neighbors, friends and those in need.

The June 17 golf tournament will help continue Mr. Lester's legacy of giving. Every cent raised by the event will directly assist a cancer patient in Lee, Scott or Wise counties or the City of Norton.

The Harold Lester Fund has assisted with purchase of medications and materials for ramps to make homes accessible for cancer patients. The fund also pays rent, water bills and electric bills because people undergoing cancer treatment often cannot continue to work.

You can support the golf tournament as a player, company sponsor or individual sponsor. All donations are tax deductible.

For more information, to receive an entry form or to find out how to be a sponsor, please contact MLCC Coordinator Tiffany Jacobs at 276-523-4202 or tiffany.jacobs@meoc.org.

AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers needed

MEOC's AmeriCorps Seniors, formerly the Foster Grandparent Program, provides volunteer opportunities for people age 55 and older willing to devote at least 15 hours a week to tutoring and caring for children in partnership with teachers in pre-school, Head Start, kindergarten and elementary schools.

Benefits include a \$3 hourly tax-free stipend, a daily free meal, transportation, accident insurance, and the opportunity to be a loving, caring grandparent to a needy child.

MEOC's AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers are assigned to classrooms throughout the agency's service area of Lee, Scott and Wise counties and the City of Norton.

Proof of COVID-19 vaccination is required to participate in the program, or volunteers may request a religious/medical exemption.

Contact Brandi Barnette at 276-523-4202 or brandi.barnette@meoc.org to learn more.

Online insomnia study focus is family caregivers

If you are helping to provide care to a loved one, and you are having trouble sleeping, you may be eligible to participate in an online research study, the SHUTi-CARE study conducted by the University of Virginia in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh (ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT04986904).

All participants in this study receive access to the online insomnia program (SHUTi) at no cost, and participants can also earn up to \$80 in gift certificates.

If you are interested in learning more and submitting an interest form, please visit the study website at www.shuticare.org. The research team may also be contacted for more information by email at shuticare@virginia.edu or calling toll-free 1-866-462-3774.

Want to age in your own home, but need support to do so?



Mountain Empire PACE can help.

PACE helps older adults at least age 55 live at home even after they are eligible for nursing facility level of care.

Services include but are not limited to:

- Primary medical, specialty care
- Medication management
- Transportation
- Meals, dietary counseling
- Therapy services
- In-home assistance
- Social engagement

Call to learn more about eligibility, available services, and how to enroll.

276-523-0599



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*Serving Lee, Scott and Wise Counties
and the City of Norton*



Keep your independence. Let us provide the care you need.

Consuming fewer sugary drinks can improve health

Do you drink a lot of sugary beverages such as soda, sweet tea and juice? If so, you may be eligible to join a research study being done by the University of Virginia.

Those who are approved for and participate in the study will get up to \$200 in gift cards for completing follow-up health assessments. You will also receive a scale valued at \$110.

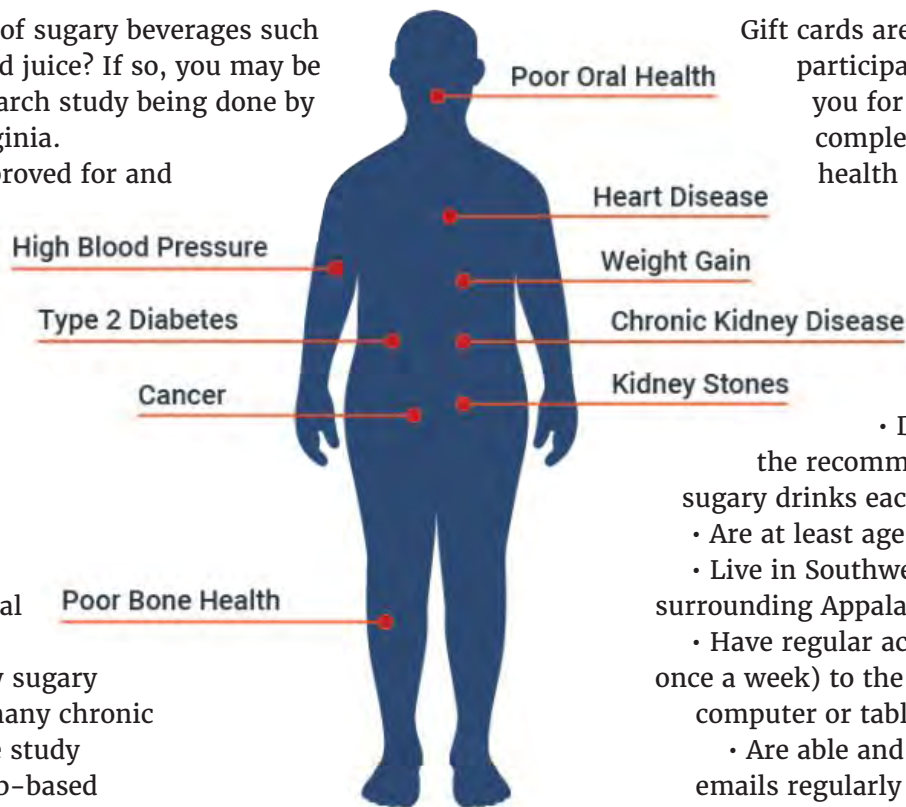
The iSIPsmarter study is run by UVA researchers and funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Drinking too many sugary drinks is related to many chronic health problems. The study will compare two web-based programs designed to help people decrease sugary drinks. The study also aims to help people improve their diet, weight and quality of life.

According to the study website, participants use the program for nine weeks and complete health assessments at the time they join and again at nine weeks, six months, and 18 months.

HOW TO LEARN MORE

Visit www.isipsmarter.org to learn more about the study and complete an interest form. You may also email Donna-Jean Brock at djbrock@virginia.edu for more information.



Health Risks of Too Many Sugary Drinks

Gift cards are provided to participants as a thank you for their time to complete the follow-up health assessments.

ELIGIBILITY

You are eligible to join the study if you:

- Drink more than the recommended amount of sugary drinks each day.
- Are at least age 18.
- Live in Southwest Virginia or surrounding Appalachian region.
- Have regular access (at least once a week) to the internet and a computer or tablet.
- Are able and willing to check emails regularly for reminders to complete program tasks.
- Are able and willing to receive text message reminders to complete program tasks.

iSIPsmarter is a research study comparing two web-based programs to help adults drink fewer sugary drinks



iSIPsmarter

- ✓ Enrolls interested participants in 1 of 2 no-cost, 9-week long, web-based programs
- ✓ Teaches you about how and why to drink fewer sugary drinks
- ✓ Gives you support to make sugary drink changes
- ✓ Builds on 10 years of research experience working to improve the health of adults in Appalachia
- ✓ Provides incentives up to \$200 in gift cards and a scale worth \$110

To learn more about this web-based* study, visit isipsmarter.org.

* No travel is required for this study



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