



Delivering a meal and goodwill

By Rich Archbold

Photos by Stephen Carr



Ralph and Marilou Laudenslayer talk with Doris Isenberger, 100, left, after Marilou and her husband delivered Doris her *Meals On Wheels*. Betty Amer's eyes lit up and her dog, Baby, barked happily when they saw the couple walking up the steps bearing gifts.

They weren't exactly the Three Wise Men bringing gold, frankincense and myrrh, but they might just as well have been.

They were Ralph and Marilou Laudenslayer who were delivering packages of hot food and love to elderly shut-ins on their route through Long Beach's Westside.

"They are just like family," Betty, 93, beamed while Baby jumped up and down in her holiday red-and-green tutu.

The Laudenslayers are just two of the small but amazing army of volunteers who labor every week bringing comfort and sustenance to an average of 300 homebound seniors, veterans and disabled clients as part of the nonprofit Meals on Wheels program.

One day last week, the parking lot at Belmont Heights United Methodist Church, 310 Termino Ave., was a flurry of activity as drivers came to pick up food deliveries. Inside the church, volunteers were packaging the food. (There are two other delivery pickup locations: North Long Beach Christian Church, 1115 E. Market St.; and St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 5633 Wardlow Road.)

The meal Wednesday was fish amandine with lyonnaise noodles, a squash medley, spinach salad with Mandarin oranges, tropical fruit salad and rolls. The lunch included a chicken salad sandwich and banana. All meals are served with low-fat milk.

Meanwhile, the Laudenslayers drove up in their 2004 Honda, picked up their precious gifts of food, checked their route list and went on their way. Ralph does the driving; Marilou does the navigating. They make deliveries once a week. Other volunteers handle the other days Monday through Friday.

It takes the Laudenslayers two or three hours to deliver their packages to 16 clients, most waiting alone in their homes, though some have caregivers.

As seen in the
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on December 25, 2011

The clients, volunteers and staff of *Meals on Wheels of Long Beach* would like to thank **Rich Archbold** for his thoughtful and insightful article and the photography of **Stephen Carr**

“They are all so cheerful and glad to see us,” Marilou says from her front seat spot.

She knows every client’s story, their aches and pains, their personalities and their food needs if they’re diabetic. As we drove up to Betty Amer’s house, Marilou said, “She is such a lovely person and has a poodle/Maltese named Baby.”

Sure enough, there was Betty in her wheelchair happy to see the Laudenslayers while Baby barked. Close by was Betty’s caregiver, Rosalie.

Betty grew up in Oklahoma and moved to Long Beach where she taught math for 30 years to students at Hill Junior High and Lincoln and Burcham elementary schools.

“I loved math, and I loved the students,” she said.

Another of her loves is the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. She has a rally monkey above the fireplace. She keeps up with the team, noting that the additions of Albert Pujols of the St. Louis Cardinals and C.J. Wilson of the Texas Rangers might help the Angels win the World Series.



In the “small world category,” she also noted that the son of one of her cousins is Mike Sheppard, who was coach of the Long Beach State football team (when they had one) from 1984 to 1986. Sheppard, now quarterbacks coach for the professional Jacksonville Jaguars, “calls me if I don’t call him,” Betty says.



As the Laudenslayers continue on their route, they deliver food to a number of delightful people. There’s the friendly 76-year-old man from Guatemala who speaks only Spanish, but has the help of a caregiver who translates for the Laudenslayers.

There’s another man who is a voracious reader with books placed neatly all over the living room. An 80-year-old woman, hearing Christmas music, tells us that her late

husband “sang better than Bing Crosby.” Another man talks about his wife who has Alzheimer’s and about his cataracts.

Doris Isenberger, who turned 100 in July, is working a Press-Telegram crossword puzzle when the Laudenslayers arrive at her home on Daisy Avenue. She turns out to be an avid baseball fan and talks knowingly about players, teams and statistics.

All of these clients have different stories to tell, but they all have one thing in common.

“They just keep going despite their problems,” said Marilou. “They are holding on as hard as they can to what independence they have left.”

In addition to their giving nature, the Laudenslayers are also extremely modest.

“They are a wonderful couple who have been making deliveries for more than 16 years,” said Bill Cruikshank, who supervises the army of volunteers as operations director for Meals on Wheels.



The Laudenslayers have been married 55 years, had four children in five years - “It was my hobby,” Marilou said with a laugh - and will spend Christmas with their family in Garden Grove. Ralph, a Penn State University graduate, retired from Long Beach’s Parks and Recreation Department as director of the Senior Center.

Why do they do their weekly deliveries?

“Helping our clients is very uplifting to us,” Marilou says. “I think we get

more satisfaction out of this than they do.” Ralph nods his head in agreement.

Now, Ralph and Marilou might not be the Three Wise Men, but they certainly are the Wise Couple, delivering their gifts of food and love in the true spirit of Christmas.

Want to help?

It began as a pilot program and service project of Soroptimist International of Long Beach with 10 clients in 1971. The organization now delivers two nutritionally balanced meals Monday through Friday to about 300 clients for a fee of \$6.50 per day. Under certain conditions, some of the fee may be subsidized.

In 2012 *Meals on Wheels* will be introducing several new programs, including **Adopt a Senior**, to allow the organization to serve a greater number of lower-income seniors and veterans.

To volunteer, call 562-439-5000, or send an email to mowlbinc@yahoo.com.

To donate, visit www.MealsonWheelsofLongBeach.org, or mail a check to *Meals on Wheels, P.O. Box 15688, Long Beach, CA 90815.*

All donations are tax-deductible.