

March 2025

## Order up!

Remember to place your Mobile Meals orders at the beginning of each month.

Need help ordering?  
Call the HelpLine at 520-622-1600

Phone referrals accepted.  
Or apply through the website:  
[mobilemealssoaz.org](http://mobilemealssoaz.org)

## Upcoming Holidays No Meal Deliveries:

Memorial Day, May 26  
Independence Day, July 4

## The Value of Good Food

A 2024 Healthy Minds Poll by American Psychiatric Association reports that Americans are twice as likely to say their moods decline in winter (41%). The poll also looked into which activities most likely boost mood in the winter. **Guess what polled as the top choice? It was eating good food (46%)!** Reading, watching TV & other indoor habits was second (42%), followed by spending time with family and friends at the holidays (40%).

## Meet Mobile Meals CEO L'Don Sawyer:

# Setting a Healthy Framework for 2025

When someone asks **"what"** is Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona (MMSA), CEO L'Don Sawyer sometimes smiles and suggests changing the question to **"who"** is Mobile Meals.

MMSA is more than an organization, it's a community, says L'Don: "It's **neighbors helping neighbors** have access to the nutritious meals and social connections needed to stay independent and healthy."

**Vocation of Service.** This focus on neighborliness has always been L'Don's passion. After earning her MA in Gerontology, she turned her avocation into a vocation, focusing on adults and well-being. Following a move to Tucson, she directed senior services at Tucson Medical Center and then served as the CEO at St. Luke's Home, among other community leadership positions. She assumed the helm of MMSA in December 2023. "It is an organization that I've held close to my heart for years. Everyone believes in our role in the community," notes L'Don.

**At MMSA, it's important for everyone to feel understood, valued, and cared for.** Affordable services, home-delivered by trained and kind volunteers, help achieve this. L'Don knows: **"We lift spirits every day!"** Behind each of the deliveries is mindful decision-making, with L'Don working with the team to ensure everyone understands the impact of nourishing meals and friendly visits on homebound adults.

**When a volunteer makes the delivery, the social connection can even be a lifeline,** says L'Don. One

client, L'Don recalls, was at an impasse at home, recovering from illness. Simple tasks like getting groceries and cooking meals were nearly impossible. She was having trouble managing on her own. MMSA was called to help. "We were reinforcing her well-being and helping her stay in her home," recalls L'Don.

**"Mobile Meals is a community** that says, 'That's how life should be if someone needs support. It's our turn to be good neighbors!'"

**Nourishing Hope.** As she focuses on operations and building community connections, L'Don also is inspiring innovations that benefit clients.

Several months ago, a partnership with Vantage West Credit Union adopted a delivery route staffed with dedicated employees. Dietary interns from the University of Arizona are now on board to share their expertise. A top priority—ensuring MMSA had the right people in the right roles to support clients—was realized. Communications and training efforts with volunteers have stepped up.

## L'Don & MMSA's Client Outreach priority:

"We want all clients to enjoy life-affirming healthy foods that improve well-being. The

capacity to deliver this distinguishes MMSA moving forward and elevates our mission."





## March National Nutrition Month®

This annual campaign, established in 1973 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, invites everyone to make informed food choices and develop healthful eating habits.

This year's theme is: **"Food Connects Us."**

Melissa at Mobile Meals says: "Food is that tradition, comfort and connecting factor for many of us.

Whether it's cooking or just sharing a meal, food helps us stay close to our culture, our family and our community. And good food keeps us in good health!"

## Price Update for Therapeutic Meals

Value, freshness, taste and quality...that's the focus in selecting our meal products.

The vast majority of clients choose our standard **"Healthy diet"** meals, which are still priced at \$5 per meal.

In challenging times of rising prices, however, effective

March 17, the price of

**Therapeutic** meals for Cardiac, Diabetic, Higher Protein (cancer support), Renal and Vegetarian diets increases to \$7.

Service is our highest priority!

If you have questions, please call **520-622-1600**

# Breaking Bread with the Team in the Mobile Meals Kitchen

Outside the bustling Mobile Meals kitchen one early winter morning, cool breezes are giving way to warming aromas as several hundred entrees are readied for the day's deliveries. Director of Food Services Melissa Hernandez was with her chefs, preparing today's mix of healthy meals and variety of therapeutic offerings. It's all important, says Melissa—plating a diversity of fresh, delicious and colorful foods. "We eat with all our senses, you know," Melissa explains.

**Serving thousands of quality, nutritious meals each year is no easy feat,** yet it's done with pride and overseen by Melissa on a daily basis. With her food certifications and business degree from California, Melissa became MMSA Food Services director in January 2024.

Knowing about the role food plays in individual well-being came early to Melissa, who learned to cook from her grandfather in their family kitchen. "After school he would teach me to create homemade-from-scratch meals. I grew up understanding the benefits of local markets and the comforts of good food."

**The logistics of MMSA menu planning requires attention to detail.** What factors into the menu rotation primarily depends on the freshest ingredients available. The kitchen staff regularly taste-tests to seek out vegetables and fruits that add variety. A dry-erase board in Melissa's office helps keep the monthly menus balanced and flavorful.

Melissa carefully follows updates on nutrition standards when she develops MMSA's meal options. Client favorites also figure in her menu plans. "Client confidence in what we serve is my priority. A client requiring a diabetic option can have peace of mind knowing there's proper nutrition as well the comfort of good food," she illustrates.

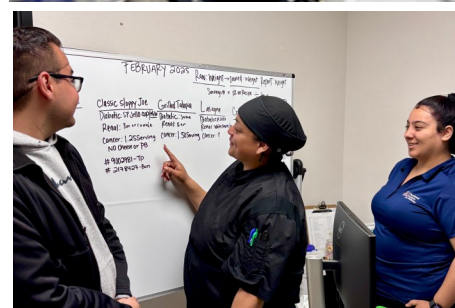
With eggs still a challenge, Melissa is ever-watchful of supply chain issues: What's fresh and healthy? What's tasty? What's of value?

**Melissa is happiest when clients call to request entree favorites for the monthly menus.** In addition to rolling up her sleeves to help staff with prepping

and cooking, Melissa often goes on deliveries to check on client needs. One gentleman requiring a therapeutic menu just loves the lasagna, Melissa mentions. "He'll order up several to freeze when the menu features it," she adds.

**It's also fun introducing new flavors** that receive the seal of approval from clients. She says: "I always have curry paste and coconut milk in my pantry. Healthy ingredients can be used to add flair or help reduce salt intake."

**Food certainly is a connecting factor for many of us,** Melissa concurs. "Food memory and tradition influence our health and our moods, too. So in the MMSA kitchen, I want to make every bite count in terms of taste, nutrition and value. And I want to make sure it's packed with lots of love," she says.



(Top) Director of Food Services Melissa Hernandez. (Bottom) Melissa with U of A intern Czarina Ojeda (r) and nutrition consultant Brian Segovia (l) discuss menu.

Volunteer Spotlight

## Generosity Is a Habit for Service Duo John and Linda Bryant

John and Linda Bryant's stewardship reminds us of the goodness in people. Their commitment to Mobile Meals also underscores the powerful impact of volunteering, and how kindness translates into community service.

Both have been volunteering more than 25 years—delivering what amounts to **thousands of meals to clients**, amassing **thousands of hours in volunteer service** over the decades.

**Service comes naturally** to Linda and John—both retired from the United States Army. John retired with the rank of Colonel and Linda retired as a Lieutenant Colonel Nurse. Both traveled across the world during their careers. They fell in love with Tucson during one tour, when the Army had sent John to U of A grad school, and they returned here in their retirement.

**We knew we wanted to continue lives of service even in retirement**, recalls Linda, who happened to stop at a Mobile Meals information table during one community fair in 1998. “When it comes down to it, good nourishment and companionship are the foundation of community and personal well-being,” they both agreed. So they began delivering for Mobile Meals, which in the early days was based out of St. Joseph's Hospital.

**Over the years, both John and Linda recall many experiences which demonstrate how Mobile Meals' value goes way beyond food nourishment.** Only when pressed will John and Linda explain how their deliveries contribute to quality of life. On one visit, John mentions how his 911 call helped save an elder who had fallen; Linda notes how she and John often help set the table for a visually-impaired client. The two always like to add special touches to their deliveries, so Linda purchases colorful or themed paper napkins to bring along with the food deliveries. “The napkins always seem to add a smile to the day for everyone,” they both assert.

**John and Linda see Mobile Meals continuing to step up to serve communities and expand programs.** “Eating right is a universal need, and when clients aren't able to shop and cook for

themselves, Mobile Meals is what can bring contentment and nourishment,” they observe.

When not driving with Mobile Meals, the two are involved in many other activities—John serves on various nonprofit boards while Linda is a member of Tucson Downtown Lions Club. Both enthusiastically support the Tucson Rodeo, volunteering every year in event preparation and working the food concessions.

**“Having Mobile Meals in the community can only benefit us all for years to come,”** John and Linda note.



*Above:  
John & Linda  
loading &  
readying  
their day's  
deliveries at  
the MMSA  
east side  
pickup  
location*



*Left:  
Linda and  
John  
delivering to  
client Peppi  
Heinemann*

**Do you know someone  
who wants to volunteer?  
Contact Henry at 520-622-1600**

# Joining Forces with Pima County to Promote Health

The Pima County Health Department knows that public health matters. With a goal of protecting and improving community well-being, the department has introduced the **Healthy Pima Initiative**—

a community health task force that mobilizes local resources and increases awareness about the steps needed to tackle the County's health priorities.

The ramped-up, multi-faceted effort by the County includes a **Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)** that brings together community-based organizations and hospitals in research that helps identify the County's top health priorities, what is working in terms of health improvements and where there is opportunity for growth. A Community Health Improvement Plan based on the research data now guides County action groups as they work on specific health outcomes. Indicators or areas of focus include access to healthy foods, health insurance, perceived health and wellness, as well as the focus on diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular. Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona (MMSA) is partnering with the task force to help expand program access and awareness for older adults, and be part of a County beacon in public health education, research and advocacy.

Several new training programs and a toolbox have been launched through the program, representing a step forward in the County's outreach and commitment to community. Here are two examples of free resources available to the community:

**MHFA | Mental Health First Aid (Adult/Youth)** is an eight-hour, in-person training program that instructs on how to recognize signs of mental health or substance abuse challenges and provides guidance on resources as well as certification for the training participant.

**QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention** is a virtual or in-person, 1-2-hour training program that teaches participants to recognize and respond to warning signs of a mental health crisis.

"Mobile Meals is eager to be part of the collaboration, especially as it relates to the nutrition and well-being of those we serve," say MMSA CEO L'Don Sawyer.

In addition to the training programs, a variety of web resources now are available. For free tools—from blood pressure and memory kits to additional information on personal care assistance and homebound vaccination programs...and for information on the free training—please see the **Education and Outreach section of the Pima County Health Department website:** <https://www.pima.gov/2033/Education-Outreach>

## Community Resource

You can connect with **TMC for Seniors** to help you stay healthy even when homebound!

Community partner **TMC for Seniors** offers many resources. **Check out the TMC event calendar:** <https://tinyurl.com/hn7bbpaa>

Visit  
TMC for Seniors Center  
Mon-Fri  
2695 N. Craycroft  
520-324-1960

## By the Numbers

**186**

caring volunteers  
deliver five days a week.

**39,000**

deliveries were made in 2024  
in Tucson, Sahuarita and  
Green Valley.

**57,985**

entrees were served in 2024  
in a variety of regular or special  
diet and kosher meals.



Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona (MMSA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that has been delivering nutrition for more than 50 years.

### Our Mission:

Delivering nutritious meals to people in Southern Arizona through a network of caring individuals.

### For more information:

3355 S. Sixth Avenue  
Tucson, AZ 85713  
520-622-1600  
[MobileMealsSoAz.org](http://MobileMealsSoAz.org)