

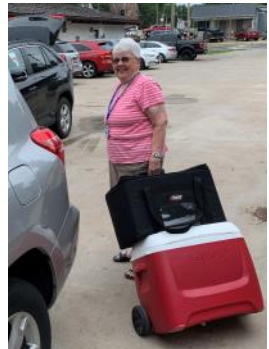
Betty Elsner

AmeriCorps Seniors Lifetime Impact Volunteer

Betty Elsner has made a remarkable difference for the people of Wisconsin over four decades of service with RSVP of Dane County. Betty initially responded to their call for volunteers in September 1978 when RSVP of Dane County first launched their service to deliver meals to older adults. She made her volunteer deliveries a priority, always fitting her service into her work schedule. She not only continued her deliveries after her retirement, but she expanded her service by joining the kitchen crew at the Stoughton Area Senior Center, helping to put the meals together before delivering her regular route. In her over 42 years of service, she has delivered an estimated 38,000 meals to seniors who depend on these meals to be able to live independently.



Betty realized early on during her volunteering that she was often the only person that the seniors she delivered meals to would see that day. To provide additional opportunities for these seniors, she would occasionally draft her teenage son to help deliver meals with her, as her home delivered meal clients always enjoyed having young visitors. The seniors that receive these meals not only depend on them to live where they wish and to eat healthier foods, but they also report that the RSVP volunteer that delivers their meal gives them someone to talk to, a sense of safety, and a link to get more support. Through her service, Betty has brought a friendly reassurance to some of the most isolated and vulnerable community members that someone cares for them.



Betty has gone to great lengths to always be there for these older adults, not even letting broken bones stop her service. After hurting her wrist at work late one Sunday night, she did not think there was enough time to get a substitute volunteer driver for her Monday morning home-delivered meal shift. Wanting to ensure these meals would still be received, her husband drove her to all of the homes on her schedule and she still delivered the meals. Only afterwards did she see a doctor, finding out that her wrist was broken. Betty never considered canceling because she knew that the home delivered meal recipients depended on her.

When the senior center had to stop using older adult volunteers to deliver meals for several months due to COVID-19 last spring, she said that not being able to provide her AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer service “almost did her in” and that she was incredibly happy when she could deliver meals again. After returning to service, she was able to help the Stoughton Area Senior Center reach seniors that were now even more in need of these meal deliveries due to the pandemic, as their volunteer team ultimately delivered over 10,000 meals in Stoughton in 2020.

Betty Elsner is a vital member of the RSVP of Dane County volunteer team and a big reason that the meal recipients have a positive experience. She is their longest serving volunteer and the longest actively serving AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer in Wisconsin. Throughout the last 42 years and still now every Monday, Betty has not just packed up and delivered meals, she has delivered companionship and healthier and happier futures for older adults in need.