

COVID-19: How Townships React

IN A TIME FULL OF UNCERTAINTY, townships throughout the state have stepped up to take care of their communities. This article will feature submissions from just a few of those townships who have gone the extra mile to make sure that those who have been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic are not going without. We thank every person who has been a helping hand during these times.

Oak Park Township and River Forest Township, Cook County



Blue Cap Driver delivering meals



Village of Oak Park Inspectors delivering meals



Cook County sheriffs delivering meals



Parker-Weisman family delivering meals



Staff volunteers delivering meals

Senior Services of Oak Park and River Forest Townships has been working diligently to modify the delivery of their programs and services while striving to meet the increased demand to feed older adults in the community while they are sheltering in place to stay safe and healthy.



Andy Teitelman, AgeOptions Advisory Council, performing for the Virtual Sing Along.



Flyer for the Virtual Sing Along.

Oak Park and River Forest are also striving to serve older adults through telephonic means for case management, benefits assistance, caregiver support, information and assistance, well-being checks, as the local Case Coordination Unit, Adult Protective Services unit, and Money Management Unit.

They have successfully partnered with the local YMCA and Housing Forward (local social service provider working to help individuals and families end homelessness) to feed individuals age 60+, in need of food, registered in their programs.

Oak Park and River Forest bus drivers used our vehicles to assist Beyond Hunger (our local food pantry), provide delivery of pantry items to older adults age 60+ in need of additional food.

Their meal delivery to residents who are homebound has increased more than 68% in less than a month. Oak Park and River Forest are immensely grateful for all of the support from staff, volunteers, and local community partners like:

- Cook County Sheriff's Department
- Blue Cab
- Village of Oak Park
- AgeOptions

On April 21, Oak Park and River Forest townships held a virtual sing along for our Memory Café with performer Andy Teitelman who is also a member of the AgeOptions Advisory Council.

Oak Park and River Forest Townships has also worked with other local providers to develop an OPRF COVID-19 local resource guide: bit.ly/oprfguide

They have had an overwhelming response from local community members wanting to help. Volunteers are delivering meals, making masks, grocery shopping and delivering groceries and prescriptions among other things.

Oak Park and River Forest townships have created, in partnership with the Park District of Oak Park, an on-line portal for volunteers to sign up to help us meet the essential needs of seniors. If interested in volunteering with Oak Park Township Senior Services, please go to the Oak Park COVID-19 Community Response Volunteer Interest survey at <https://bit.ly/399p9zW>.

The Park District of Oak Park is also calling for volunteers to make masks which will then be laundered and distributed to members of the community:

<https://www.facebook.com/parkdistrictofaokpark/photos/pb.25281677764.-2207520000../10156969065732765/?type=3&theater>

The Village of River Forest and the River Forest Township along with Senior Services have coordinated efforts for a COVID-19 Senior Response Team. https://www.vrf.us/guides/guide/33?utm_source=%2fcoronavirus&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=redirect-seniorprogram

The townships are so happy to see their Oak Park and River Forest communities coming together in this time of need.

Wheeling Township, Cook County

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wheeling Township has been assisting its residents with a variety of vital services. “During these unprecedented times, we



Wheeling Township performing intake of their food pantry



Wheeling Township food pantry



Wheeling Township staff performing Care Calls



are focused on ensuring residents have transportation to medical needs like dialysis and access to food,” Wheeling Township Supervisor Kathleen Penner said. “Support and guidance will continue to be our first priority for all Township residents who need it.” Additionally, Wheeling Township has been making ‘care calls’

to transportation passengers, providing rides to grocery stores/pharmacies and delivering Home Delivered Meals to the homebound.

Schaumburg Township, Cook County

The coronavirus pandemic has challenged our communities to provide for their families, travel to necessary medical appointments, socialize for their mental and emotional health and more. The Township of Schaumburg has stepped up to be a source of assistance and stability during these uncertain times. Below are all the ways the Township has remained committed to providing the essential services residents need:

Food Pantry

Food insecurity has been a prominent concern among Schaumburg Township’s residents. For the safety of their clients and staff, they changed our pantry operations from client choice to a drive-through service twice a week. This also allows the township to serve more people than they would on an appoint-



Staff member Ami-Nell Scurry packs a bag of food



Schaumburg Township Gym becomes the pantry staging center



Welfare Services Director Dannette Zanoni loads a care with food at the drive-thru pantry



Schaumburg Township Supervisor Timothy Heneghan supporting the pantry

ment-basis. To do this, they have moved our sorting operations to the gymnasium and have shifted staff to help sort, pack, and load emergency bags.

In the last three weeks, Schaumburg Township has served over 2,300 households (8,659 household members). They typically see 650 households in four weeks. They expect the need for food to increase during this time and are constantly preparing to meet that need.

Transportation Services

The Transportation Services Department triaged needs and adjusted their services to accommodate dialysis and urgently needed medical appointments. Each driver transports one passenger at a time, adheres to a strict sanitation sched-



Transportation ready to help

ule and wears a face mask and gloves. While regular trips to local grocery stores were temporarily suspended, the Township saw the need for food access to home-bound residents. Furthermore, residents who could physically go to a grocery store but were higher risk were extremely hesitant and fearful to leave their homes – even for food. Thus, the Township mobilized to deliver pantry bags to those unable to come to the Township. As a result, Schaumburg Township has been able to deliver hundreds of pantry bags to individual homes.

Disability, Senior and Welfare Services and Assessor's Office

The Township is proud to continue services remotely. Caseworkers assist with Medicare issues, troubleshoot benefit problems, or respond to requests for information and assistance. The Township also remains available to assist with the Emergency and General Assistance Programs. Their Assessor's Office continues to file exemptions and certificate of error forms with the Cook County Assessor's Office. They've also ramped up their social media presence to keep the public informed and interested in how the Township is filling the gaps.

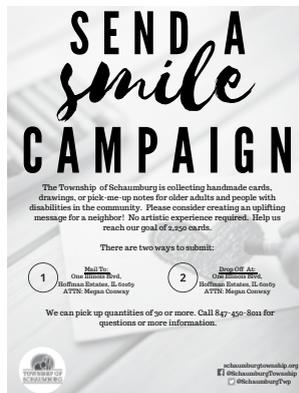
Using several remote volunteers, staff made thousands of wellness calls to check in on the most vulnerable in our community. In speaking with their residents during wellness calls, a few trends emerged. Most folks were doing okay and had family or friends to help them get supplies, provide food, or offer remote socialization. However, there were many folks who were anxious and isolated. Schaumburg Township did several things to assist these residents.



Sample of care packages sent to older adults and persons with disabilities. Care packages also would have handwritten notes.

1) Created care packages with a variety of personal care items, snacks and fun activities (adult coloring books, Sudoku puzzle books, deck of cards, etc) (See pictures). Staff and officials delivered these packages, without contact, to people requesting it. They also solicited donations from their community members of care packages or other items for inclusion. Each item was sprayed with a disinfectant and kept "quarantined" for two days before distribution.

2) Established the "Share a Smile" campaign (see flyer). They requested community members, Officials, staff, volunteers and others to write a card, send an uplifting message, or color a picture for their clients.



Send a smile campaign flyer. Schaumburg Township is asking for community members, Officials, staff, volunteers and others to write a card, send an uplifting message, or color a picture for their clients to send out to residents.



Easter baskets ready for delivery

People were asked to mail messages in, bring to Township and put in a drop-box, or have a staff member pick up. Their goal was to receive 2,250 notes to send out to people looking for social connection.

3) Launched a daily “Virtual Program.” Every day at 10 AM, residents can call in or log on from a computer to participate in a virtual program. For security purposes, they ask people register in advance to receive a password. On Mondays we have an exercise class, Thursdays are Bingo days and Friday is a Coffee Klatch. Officials helped deliver sanitized bingo cards to our residents and people play for small prizes and fun. Other sessions include trivia, a Medicare information session, live music, language lesson and more!

4) Adjusted scheduled other programs. The Disability Services team hosts an annual “Breakfast with the Bunny” event for children with disabilities and their families. In lieu of the event this year, the staff created special Easter baskets with candy, bubbles and special presents. Schaumburg Township worked with the Cook County Commissioner to help distribute the baskets to the children and their siblings. They heard from so many folks how appreciative they were for this gesture since the event was cancelled.

Highway Department

The Township of Schaumburg Highway Department is lending a hand to outside organizations as well. During a late spring snow, the highway staff helped Cook County plow several bridges in our area.

At The Township of Schaumburg, they received dozens of requests from people looking to volunteer, donate, or support their neighbors with in-kind assistance. Staff has worked with local supporters to figure out how to harness this goodwill, while practicing social distancing. As the situation surrounding coronavirus continues to evolve so does their response. They believe

this is a unique time for townships to demonstrate our value to residents and we are developing creative and innovative ways to support our community. Their hope is that despite the tragedy of coronavirus, we can spread kindness and be a source of support for our community’s most.

Thornton Township, Cook County



With a pandemic gripping the nation, Thornton Township knew there would be certain essential services that they would keep open at all cost. One of them was their successful food pantry. Typically, they serve 400 families each week offering them a box of perishable and nonperishable items from canned foods to bread, milk and meat. When COVID-19 hit, their numbers increased to serving more than 2,100 families each week. There would be days where the lines of cars for their drive through food service spanned four blocks long.

“What we are experiencing now is an example of how the Township government is on the front lines every single day, in providing meaningful help to families in need. We have a special responsibility to help people and we’re meeting that charge every day,” said Frank M. Zuccarelli, Thornton Township Supervisor.

They expect the food resource center to be a crucial resource for the community long after the stay-at-home order is lifted and the curve is flattened.

“If we weren’t here to help people, a lot of people wouldn’t know what to do for meals for their families,” said Ernst Lamothe, Thornton Township.

Many people will emerge from this pandemic without the resources they need and even deeper food insecurity.

“We have many people in line who have never used our services and I think that’s a symptom of what we’re going to be seeing throughout the spring, summer and fall,” said Troy O’Quin, Thornton Township General Assistance Director.

This has definitely been a unique time in the coun-



Thornton Township staff and volunteers preparing food pantry deliveries to service the residents of the township.

try. Thornton Township struggled deciding what services to keep open but they also needed to make sure their residents were safe, especially since they serve many older adults in the community. Once the schools and businesses decided to close, they had to be diligent in making sure that they are not putting any of their residents or their staff at risk, while continuing to provide services for people so they wouldn't fall through the cracks. Township government is so essential, and this crisis has proven that.

"Outsiders who don't understand our impact have said that township government is an extra layer of government. We actually see that differently. We see that extra layer as a safety net for the community," added Lamothe Jr.

Thornton Township continued their senior lunch program and turned it into a carry-out service three times a week. Other programs that continued was their senior lawn care initiative that cuts seniors grass for free.

One difficult part of this process was that their Township employees and their community clients are their families. Many of staff have worked with residents and each other for decades. With the incredible culture they have created, it's difficult to be unable to hug, kiss, and shake hands! They are used to being able to give our client hugs when they see them in need—the staff has always been a strong shoulder for them to cry on and a friendly face to deliver news of help.

“All we know right now is that we will get through this together. The coronavirus is something that doesn't discriminate. It affects all genders, all political and religious affiliations, the wealthy and underserved, all cultures, East Coast, West Coast, South, or Midwest. We need to work together and stay united,” said Lamothe Jr.

DeKalb Township, DeKalb County

DeKalb Township has been hard at work providing services and resources for our residents and community partners. Highway Commissioner Smith and the road crew have loaned safety markers to assist with meal distribution for school aged children who walk to get their meals from various pick-up sites since our local schools closed down. Many children rely upon the meals they receive at school so we wanted to ensure their safety walking to and from the pick-up sites.

Highway Commissioner Smith and Supervisor Johnson worked together to supply two local agencies (Hope Haven, and Safe Passage) with much needed cleaning supplies. Highway Commissioner Smith was able to arrange a no-contact drop off for the safety of all.

To date, the Township has provided \$5,000.00 to 3 different pantries (DeKalb County Community Gardens, Salvation Army, Barb Food Mart), \$3,000 to VAC (Meals on Wheels Program), and \$250.00 of personal care items needed for the women and children of the domestic abuse shelter (Safe Passage).

Bloom Township, Cook County

Bloom Township Center located in Suburban Cook County has continued to be of public service to its 12 Communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food Pantry services remain open during distribution hours of Monday 3pm-7pm and Wednesday 10am-2pm for curbside pickup. The Food Pantry is doing home deliveries to high-risk senior and disabled residents by utilizing the Senior Wheels Paratransit program, volunteers from Cook County Sheriff Tom Darts office, Township Trustee Michael Noonan, the Bloom Township Highway Department, local mayors; Eugene Williams of Lynwood and Derrick Burgess of Sauk Village.

Bloom Township Senior Services has continued to receive and return calls, provide Senior Health Insur-



Volunteers working the Bloom Township Food Pantry



ance Program (SHIP) counseling, Benefit Access Applications, and has been making telephone well-being checks on the senior citizen population while working remotely. Senior services have also created several links to exercise programs including yoga, meditation and breathing exercises for seniors to do while sheltering at home along with frequent informational posts to its Bloom Township Senior Services Facebook page with the #BTC-12STRONG hashtag.

The Transportation Senior Wheels program continues to provide vital transportation services for dialysis, necessary medical, grocery, and essential service work related trips.

The General Assistance offices are working to provide GA benefits along with Emergency GA services and the Highway Department continues to provide assistance to unincorporated areas of the township.

Bloom Township has displayed alerts related to the COVID-19 pandemic on its webpage www.bloomtownship.org along with other COVID-19 resources from local, county, state and federal agencies.

New Trier Township, Cook County

New Trier Township in Winnetka Illinois has been supporting the communities it serves through their food pantry and emergency assistance programs. In order to minimize the spread of COVID-19, township staff and volunteers have been preparing bags of staple items and presenting them to clients at the front door, eliminating indoor pantry shopping until clearance to



Bloom Township's curbside pick up for their Food Pantry



Bloom Townships' Transportation Senior Wheels Program

reopen the building is received. Residents and local business owners have been extremely supportive, offering donations of non-perishable food, paper goods and hygiene items. These acts of generosity are immense, as purchasing many items through normal channels have become increasingly difficult.

The township has also increased communications, recording special editions of the New Trier Township Podcast (<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-new-trier-township-podcast/id1489196181>) and producing *The Dispatch*, an electronic newsletter sent to over 1,000 opt-in subscribers. Interviews with township grantees providing critical services are conducted via Zoom, providing up to the minute updates. The township is also working closely with municipal governments in the area to cascade health updates and local news impacting residents on our social media channels.

Local reporters have also interviewed Supervisor Alan Goldberg and Trustee Gail Schnitzer-Eisenberg regarding the food pantry and other township services. This extensive local media coverage has been very help-

ful in advising residents on supports available to help them through the pandemic.

Hanover Township, Cook County

Hanover Township implemented a temporary reduction of government functions and workforce while maintaining core services and essential operations as a result of precautions taken for the coronavirus (COVID-19). On Tuesday, March 17, Supervisor McGuire issued a local disaster proclamation in accordance with state law to enhance the Township's response and readiness. The Board of Trustees approved a resolution on March 24 to extend the proclamation until May 5.

Department of Human Services – Food Pantry

The Hanover Township Food Pantry transitioned to a curbside pick up model on March 17. Open six days a week, residents call ahead to place orders, selecting their food and supplies. Bilingual staff take down the orders and bring the supplies to the vehicles outside



Human Services Coordinator (left) Lori Orozco and Human Services Director Mary Jo Imperato packing orders for residents



Trustee Gino Martinez taking phone orders for curbside pick up at the Food Pantry

Residents pulling up outside the pantry to receive orders

of the pantry. The Township is also delivering pantry orders to home-bound residents. Since March 17, the pantry has processed over 1,200 orders for Township families.

Department of Aging Services

Since March 17, the Township has conducted over 250 rides for dialysis and other urgent medical appointments for at-risk residents. Drivers and riders, wear masks and gloves while on the buses.

Life Enrichment staff have put together a series of virtual and call-in programs to keep older adults active. Since March 17, over 30 virtual programs have been conducted for hundreds of residents, ranging from yoga, art, and networking.

The Township's Stars N Stripes Cafe is providing curbside pickup for lunches, Monday-Friday. Residents may call the Senior Center at (630) 483-5600 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. to place an order, and pickup from 11



Hanover Township Assessor Tom Smogolski delivering home-delivered meals to home-bound Township residents in the Village of Streamwood



Aging Services Director Tracey Colagrossi conducts a virtual program for Township older adults



Aging Services Caseworker Thalia Robbels performing a wellness check on a Township older adult

while also providing a social connection with phone calls.

Office of Community & Veterans Affairs

Township Veterans Service Officer Cyndi Wollack is working remotely and conducting phone or virtual appointments for Township veterans and their families. Since March 17 she has conducted over 40 appointments working remotely.

a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Staff will bring the meals to the cars waiting outside the Senior Center. Since March 17, the 910 meals have been ordered for curbside pick up.

Without missing a beat, Township has continued its Home Delivered Meal Program. Staff from across the organization have filled in to deliver over 2,000 meals to qualifying residents since March 17.

The Township Lending Closet is available during this time.

Social Services Case Workers have conducted appointments with older adults virtually or over the phone. Case workers and other Township staff have conducted over 3,000 wellness calls since March 17 ensuring residents have enough food and supplies,



Some of our staff might be out of the office temporarily, but they're still getting the job done! Veterans Service Officer Cyndi Wollack is working remotely with her dog Nola filing benefit claims for Township Vets

Department of Emergency Services



Thank you Shamrock Specialty Rx in Elburn for dropping off 36 bottles of hand sanitizer. Emergency Services members have added them to their go-bags to use when needed in responding to calls

Emergency Services volunteers have transitioned to a 24-hour staffing model in order to facilitate a quicker response to free up first responders faster, and be available for incidents that are shorter in duration. Since March 17, members have logged over 2,500 hours.

Office of Community Health



Director of Community Health Kristen Smith shows her support for the community

Township nurses are available for phone consultations and may see residents for critical in person appointments on case by case basis. Since March 17, nurses have seen 16 patients for critical health services.

Thanks to Our Community's
ESSENTIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS



Ela Township Staff work the curbside drop off at the Ela Township Community Center

Ela Township, Lake County

In a continued effort to support the needs of older adults living within Ela Township, and in compliance with current social distancing guidelines, the Ela 55+ staff has implemented an affordable curbside meal pick up option for seniors who would usually enjoy having meals at the Ela Eatery located at the Ela Township Community Center. The community center chef, Lynn Garret, has developed a variety of delicious meals that can be enjoyed by local residents over 55 years of age for only \$5 a person! Meals include a main entrée, side dishes, and dessert! Please call (847) 438-9160 to place your order. All orders must be received by the Friday prior to the week that you would like to pick up your meals. Curbside service is available Monday through Thursday at 11:30 a.m., in the front parking lot of the Ela Township Community Center located at 380 Surryse Rd., Lake Zurich, IL 60047.

Residents can view the monthly menu selections on the Ela Township 55+ Facebook page, or on our website at elatownship.org/seniors. All meals are handed out cold with reheating instructions listed on the container.

Please have exact cash or check made payable to Ela Township 55+ ready in an envelope when you arrive to pick up your order. If you are looking for some in home entertainment, the Ela 55+ staff have also developed a YouTube Channel! Search Ela Township Community Center on YouTube, and you will find a range of free and entertaining videos created to keep you moving and smiling while indoors.



Thanks to Our Team & Community!