



Kitchen staff Jeane Riley, Latoya Moore, and Joanne Seymanowski.

# *Real Services Kitchen:* Cooking and Catering for a Cause

By **Teresa Turner**, Public Relations & Advocacy Manager

**O**n a rainy morning in South Bend I visited The Regional Kitchen for Independent Living, operated by Real Services. Clients of the kitchen receive delivered meals through the Meals on Wheels program. Staff start preparing meals at 3am for 10:30-11am delivery. When I arrived, volunteers were gathered in the dining area of the kitchen, laughing about the heavy rain and carefully checking their route sheets to make sure the numbered coolers contained the corresponding meals for clients.

Meals on Wheels runs on volunteers; about 150 of the agency's 4,000 volunteers serve in this capacity. I rode along with one of them, Jeff Horn, as he delivered meals along one of the three routes he serves each week. Jeff said he started volunteering with Meals on Wheels because he wanted to give back. He delivers meals three days a week and has been volunteering with the program for ten years.



Bernard Love and Latoya Moore preparing meals for delivery.



Volunteers checking their route sheets for the day's deliveries.

Jeff and I chatted as he delivered meals to the twelve clients along his route. He expressed how rewarding it was, and how over time he and the clients had come to look forward to their brief interactions. One man on the route wanted to show him photos of his grandson. Another, an 85 year old woman who is blind, calls him "Mr. Pepsi" and always offers him a beverage (a story

which is apparently widely known among the volunteers). Some were alone and some had a caregiver or family member with them. When one client didn't answer the door, Jeff made a note on the route sheet so that someone from Real Services could follow up with a phone call to make sure the person was ok.

The Regional Kitchen for Independent Living produces about 1,000 meals/day, and currently provides meals in 5 counties. They started fundraising for the kitchen 9-1/2 years ago. Prior to the development of the kitchen, they leased kitchen space in several places.

The kitchen operates a local catering business called "Simply Catering to You," which caters events such as weddings, business luncheons, etc. 100% of the profits from the catering business are recycled back into the REAL Services Meals on



Volunteer Jeff Horn delivers meals to clients Christine and John.

Wheels program. They are now considering getting a food truck to take the business on the road.

The kitchen was their first real fund development effort. Becky Zaseck, Executive Director at REAL Services, said the big question in the beginning was, "Can we do this?" The answer was clearly a resounding "YES!" She said the City of South Bend and surrounding community really stepped forward, happy to be a part of it. It took them less than a year to raise 1.3 million dollars when they started.

Becky said the community strongly believes in supporting local elderly adults. "We all age better when we're connected." After seeing firsthand the interactions between clients and the volunteer delivering their meals, it is clear just how true that statement is. The kitchen isn't just serving up meals; they are also delivering support and a smile at the door. ■

**“  
We all age better when  
we're connected.”**

**- Becky Zaseck**  
Executive Director of REAL Services



Jeanea Riley and George Hawthorne, Director of Nutrition and Transportation.

REAL Services is an umbrella organization for more than 20 programs that assist elderly, disabled and low-income individuals in 12 northern Indiana counties. Their programs address the needs of education, nutrition, self-sufficiency, and protection for 30,000 people in northern Indiana each year.

