

Hartford Courant

Farmington mom delivering hundreds of home-cooked meals to Simsbury residents with MS



By **SUSAN DUNNE**

HARTFORD COURANT |

APR 28, 2020 | 4:10 PM

Since the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns started, Cheryl Tuggle of Farmington has been making home-cooked meals and giving them to residents of Ojakian Commons, an



apartment complex in Simsbury for people with disabilities.

Ojakian Commons in Simsbury is a 48-unit independent apartment complex for people with disabilities. They may be independent, but residents still rely on manager Shawana Jenkins to help with some things. So when Jenkins was told to work off-premises because of the coronavirus lockdown, residents worried.

Leah Tuggle is one of those residents. Leah, who lives with multiple sclerosis, like most residents at Ojakian, called her mother, Cheryl, to tell her about the dilemma. It turns out, her mother was exactly the right person to help solve the problem.

“A lot of people were panicked. Many of them do not drive. Some are in wheelchairs,” said Cheryl Tuggle, who lives in Farmington. “I already was cooking for her. So that Saturday I made food for my daughter and I had a lot extra, so I thought I’d look for takeout containers to put food in for a few extra for people who may need food.”

Ever since then, Cheryl Tuggle has come to Ojakian multiple times a week to deliver home-cooked meals to about 30 of the residents. Tuggle said she will continue to do it as long as the residents need her.

“I was talking with a friend of mine and told her about it. She said, ‘I will give you some money to make more meals for them,’” said Tuggle, 61, who calls herself a semi-retired housekeeper.

Since then, Tuggle has received contributions from other friends, her church and some of the recipients of the food.

“I’ve made chicken parm and pasta, macaroni and cheese, lasagna, pulled pork, meatloaf. I bake as well, on days I’m not delivering — cookies, cakes, brownies,” she said. “I love to cook and I love to bake. It’s been a blessing. It’s been keeping me busy.”

At first Tuggle went three times a week and later down to two times a week.

“I went down to two because there was nobody to deliver the meals to make sure they got distributed safely,” she said. “But now the manager comes twice a week to help.”

Jenkins said the delivery of the food is no-contact between her and Tuggle.

“She pulls up to the front of the building in her car and opens up the trunk. Then I take out the food and bring it into my community room and put everything in there. Typically, the maintenance guy and I go door-to-door to deliver meals,” Jenkins said.

Jenkins called Tuggle “an angel.”

“It’s amazing that she’s taking time out of her day to do this all by herself,” she said.

Jenkins added that some residents have cars and can help with grocery runs for the housebound residents. She also said there is a van service to bring residents to their doctor appointments and to the supermarket.

Mark Taylor is the pastor at River Valley Christian Center in Farmington, where Tuggle is a parishioner. He has given Tuggle Stop & Shop gift cards to buy food.

“Two months ago none of us thought we’d be here, living the way we’re living. In our church we believe that the real character of a person is shown when we’re getting pressed,” Taylor said. “At this time, it’s very easy to turn inward and go into self-preservation mode. She’s doing the exact opposite of that.”

Tuggle’s friend, Rachel Anderson, also contributed. “She has a great talent for cooking and hospitality and a great heart,” Anderson said. “She is so gracious and thoughtful. I told her, ‘This must be your calling.’”

Beatriz Torres, who lives with MS and is a resident of the complex, has received Tuggle’s food. “It helps out when I don’t feel good,” Torres said. “I don’t have to cook and it stretches my food.”

Tuggle said the contributions from friends and her church, and her own money, have kept her well-stocked with food. She said, however, that she frequently runs out of takeout containers and welcomes contributions from the public. Those who can help Tuggle with her food project can email her at cheryltuggle@hotmail.com.

Susan Dunne can be reached at sdunne@courant.com.

Amid the fear and isolation gripping our state right now in wake of the coronavirus outbreak, neighbors are stepping up in extraordinary ways to help others. In our new “Neighbors Helping Neighbors” series, we will profile those acts of kindness and generosity. If you have an idea, please email it to kmccallum@courant.com.