

Angels come bearing food and TLC

Story and photo by Rhonda Van Pelt

Editor's note: This is the final story in the Bulletin's Give! 2017 series, but the campaign continues through midnight Sunday, Dec. 31.

The best food is prepared with a big helping of tender loving care. That's the recipe Project Angel Heart has followed for 26 years of changing — maybe even saving — lives.

A man named Charles Robbins founded PAH in Denver in 1991 after seeing friends dying of HIV/AIDS. Today, the nonprofit provides medically tailored food to people coping with all types of life-threatening illness.

The Colorado Springs branch was launched in 2005 and is now headquartered on the Westside. According to Sally Rothstein, Colorado Springs regional manager, this branch is currently helping about 250 clients who receive a week's worth of delicious, nutritional food every Saturday.

And every bite is free, even for any dependents in the household. Donations and grants pay for the food and the Denver and Colorado Springs staffs.

Last April, Project Angel Heart was approved as a provider for the Colorado Choice Transitions program, paving the way to become the first Colorado-based organization to receive Medicaid reimbursement for home-delivered meals.

"When people hear of our mission, they often respond with either wishing they knew about our service when they or a loved one were navigating a significant illness, or with remarking that they are now glad

to know this exists and will keep our program in mind for 'when the time comes,'" Rothstein said.

The food is prepared in a state-of-the-art kitchen north of downtown Denver before it's frozen, sealed in trays and placed in bags labeled with each client's name. The Colorado Springs-bound bags are loaded on a truck that travels to the Care and Share facility on Colorado Springs' east side every Friday.

There, Rothstein and a team of volunteers unload the truck and check that they have all the bags they need, which can total 350 to 400. Then, they sort the bags for Project Angel Heart's 23 delivery routes across 90 square miles of the Pikes Peak region.

One batch is put on a shuttle that heads to the First United Methodist Church in downtown Colorado Springs, where some of the volunteers load their cars and head out for their Saturday morning route. The rest of

the volunteers pick up their packages at Care and Share.

Every volunteer is briefed on the clients' needs.

"Sometimes we knock on the door and have to wait five minutes

because people can't get to the door. Sometimes it's 'leave the meal in the cooler.' Sometimes people aren't home and we have a whole process for that. Sometimes it's 'please come in and put the meals away in the freezer,'" Rothstein said.

This is the fourth time PAH has participated in the Give! campaign. This year's goal is \$28,000, which would provide two weeks' worth of meals for all 250 local clients.

Project Angel Heart's menus have grown from the lasagna a Denver restaurant donated in 1991 to a range of cuisines; Rothstein said that a particular dish probably will not appear more often than every three months.

The meals also have evolved so that, for instance, people with kidney disease no longer receive high-potassium fruit. People who may have

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— Lance Carroll

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IF YOU GIVE!

This year's Give! Campaign will spotlight 75 local nonprofits through Dec. 31. To donate, go to indygive.com or mail a check to 235 S. Nevada Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80903. Include your address, phone number and email address. Please make your check payable to INDYGIVE and specify what organization you are donating to; if donating to multiple organizations, write one check and list the amounts for each organization.

IF YOU GO

Project Angel Heart will host a Give! Happy Hour, where you can learn more about the organization while enjoying a Give! Black Lager. 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 17. Bristol Brewery, 1604 S. Cascade Ave. Information: www.projectangelheart.org/events/calendar or 323-0084.



The Carroll family, from left, Thaddeus, Lacy, Violet and Lance, stand outside Care and Share on Thursday, Dec. 7.

trouble eating apples receive applesauce and diced peaches instead.

"We take a lot of pride in the fact that we do care so dang much about how good the food is, that it's meeting people's needs, that it's going to give them the best chance for health," Rothstein said.

Through the years, Project Angel Heart staff and volunteers have heard stories about how the meals have helped clients and their families, but now they're starting to see the statistics that prove the food actually lowers health costs.

Clients average seven or eight health conditions, Rothstein said, with at least one a life-threatening illness such as congestive heart failure complicated by diabetes and arthritis.

Currently, the Colorado Springs PAH relies on more than 150 volunteers to deliver the food, using their own vehicles and fuel.

It would take an additional 19 full-time staffers in Denver and Colorado Springs to do what volunteers do, Rothstein said, saving the nonprofit more than \$550,000 every year.

Among Rothstein's favorite volunteers: the Carrolls, "just the sweetest darn family." Lance the dad, Lacy the mom, Violet, 10, and Thaddeus, 7, spend around two and a half hours every other Saturday delivering Project Angel Heart meals.

"It's just so dear to our hearts as a family. It's something that bonds us together on Saturday mornings," Lance Carroll said.

The Carrolls, who've lived in Colorado Springs for nine years, had volunteered with similar organizations in Kentucky. They knew they wanted to raise their children to think about other people's needs and to contribute to their community.

"When we were considering places to volunteer, we were told over and over that our children wouldn't be allowed to participate because of reasonable logistical and safety concerns, but our children have been delivering meals with us now for seven years," Lacy Carroll said.

"They are able to contribute in a safe and meaningful way. Our community has many needs and it will be better for all of us if we each find the place where our gifts and passions can fill a void that exists for somebody else."

"We want them to be people who give back and improve the lives of others. We should encourage young people to volunteer so their generation will continue to value compassion and generosity. We will all benefit from a world rich in those virtues," Lance Carroll said.

Anyone who can't help deliver meals on Saturday mornings is welcome to decorate the delivery bags. In the hands of people of all ages and varying artistic talent, the plain brown paper bags become the means by which bodies are strengthened, days are brightened and hearts are comforted.

For more information on Give! campaign events, see page 17.

TO LEARN MORE

Project Angel Heart's local office is at 1625 W. Uintah St., Suite 1. Information: www.projectangelheart.org/about-us/colorado-springs-program or 323-0084.