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Chuck LeClaire/Beaver County Senior News

“Soup lady’s” creations are big hit at senior centers

By Gina Mazza
For *Beaver County Senior News*

A steaming bowl of nutritious, delicious soup on a crisp autumn day is the ultimate in comfort food — especially when that soup is homemade with love. And that’s exactly what is being served up at senior centers around Beaver County, according to those who stop by for lunch.

Simply by word of mouth (no pun intended), news has been catching on about Beaver County’s very own “soup lady” — as she has come to be known. Patti Kurneck, manager of Grace Meals in Gibsonia (which subcontracts with the Beaver County Office on Aging) prepares chicken noodle, broccoli cheese, wedding and other soups that are ladled out once weekly at the centers.

“The cream of potato is a favorite at all Circle of Friends sites and the vegetable barley is great,” says Donna Murphy, administrator of Circle of Friends, located in Baden, College Hill, Midland and Aliquippa. “I can’t remember having a soup [from Grace Meals] that wasn’t well received.”

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"Soup lady's" creations are big hit at senior centers

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As news of the soups' popularity was stirred up, word got back to BCOA. "Our managers routinely meet to discuss the senior center menu – what is on it, what people are saying about it and how can we improve on it," explains program monitor Susan Pollack. "We kept getting comments about how good the soup is. Hands down, that was the favorite thing on the menu. In fact, we noticed a trend that people were actually attending the centers on the days when they knew the soup was on."

Virginia Swink of Monaca, who has attended Monaca Senior Center for 26 years,

is also partial to the cream of potato. She makes a special trip when it's on the menu. "It's just like Momma used to make," she says.

"The chicken soup is also a favorite at our center," says Monaca's director Sharon Keller. "It has a rich broth and a lot of flavor."

What makes the soups so flavorful? "We let them slow cook all day, and it's just something that we like making," Patti comments. A dollop of loving care goes into the pot, as well. "I tell my staff that if they wouldn't eat it, they shouldn't send it. I ask them to think of each meal as if their family is going to be there eating it. That way, we all put a little extra into it."

Soup is on the menu year round, although in summer it is usually paired with a cold sandwich. Menu adjustments are made as feedback is shared with Patti and her cooks. "BCOA will tell me when they don't think something is working and we'll change it right away, or we'll try something new or better in its place," Patti says. "I work closely with them and our goal is to make every meal very nice for the seniors."

"Patti is always bending over backwards to accommodate for the meals or to do something extra special when the senior center managers plan parties or other events at the centers," Susan comments. "And I know she is especially proud of the soups."

Hopefully, her official "soup lady" status and all the positive comments Patti continues to receive will return to her some of the love that she gives to others through her cooking. **BCSN**

Beaver County senior centers offer shared lunch meals during hours of operation to adults ages 60 and older. Most centers are open Monday through Friday.

Circle of Friends, Aliquippa (724) 857-9989

Circle of Friends, Baden (724) 869-4224

Circle of Friends, College Hill (724) 846-1959

Circle of Friends, Midland (724) 643-9668

Monaca Senior Center, Monaca (724) 728-1422



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