

August 28, 2024



Greetings!

Wow! Another year of “Now That’s What I’m Talking About!” – Summer Lunch, a Claridon Community Helps program has come to a close. Not just another year, but our **sixth** year of providing lunches to children! In the past few months, we provided 14,099 lunches to children in Geauga County. This brings our total to 63,938 meals provided in 6 years! An amazing accomplishment that would not have been possible without you!

### During the off Season

Beginning work on next year’s lunch program begins as soon as the lunch program comes to an end. Ideas are being tossed around among us and rolling through my head before the current year’s program even ends.

Between last summer and this summer, we held a:

- **Scavenger Hunt** – This past November we held a “Are You Smarter Than A 5<sup>th</sup> Grader?” scavenger hunt where participants took photos of themselves with their interpretation of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade vocabulary word. Afterwards participants enjoyed a school lunch for dinner at Burton American Legion – Post 459.
- **Count Down To Christmas** – Each day on social media, a different item was posted that we could use for the lunch program. Items included lunch bags, cookie sheets, roasters, sandwich bags, etc.
- **Total Eclipse of the Heart Breakfast** – On the Saturday before the Eclipse, we held a breakfast fundraiser at New Testament Baptist Church. A little preparty before the Eclipse on Monday.

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*Claridon Community Helps is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization*

- **One Day Food Drive** – On March 21st, we held a Food Drive within almost all the schools within the county. The families were very, very generous and we received an abundance of shelf stable items. The items that were donated that we wouldn't be using, we divided up and sent home to families participating in the lunch program.
- **Geauga County Public Library Food Drive** – During the month of April, the Geauga County Public Library hosted a food drive at all of the branches! Patrons were very, very generous with their giving.
- **The Ask** – Many, many filled the financial need to make this year's program another success!

## **Lunch Itself**

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday we prepare a hot lunch for the children. We arrive at Claridon Congregational Church at 9. At 11 o'clock we start filling the lunch tins donated by University Hospital Geauga, so that the delivery drivers can head out the door at 11:30.

On Monday and Wednesday, we also prepared a brown bag lunch for Tuesday and Thursday. We feed the children Monday through Friday, but we only deliver their lunch three days a week.

The brown bag lunches are the same thing every Tuesday and Thursday. It includes a meat and cheese sandwich, fruit, yogurt, and a granola bar. At least once a week, depending on how many hands we had helping, we added activity sheets provided by Geauga County Public Library in their brown bag lunch.

Taco Salad, Chicken & Broccoli Alfredo, Cheeseburgers, Sloppy Joe, Pancakes & Sausage, Cheeseburger Casserole, Sweet & Sour Meatballs and Buffalo Chicken Mac-N-Cheese to name a few of the hot lunches we served on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I am sure every child did not like lunch every single day, but I know that we served a large variety of child-friendly lunches during the summer. I am sure they enjoyed most!

## **Shopping**

During the first 5 years of "Now That's What I'm Talking About!" Summer Lunch program I am proud to say that I always shopped local. The number

of meals we prepared each week has drastically increased. At the end of last summer, I made the decision to use a food service company to purchase our food and have it delivered. In the past, I spent Tuesday and Thursday running back and forth multiple times to the stores. I choose to enjoy summer on those days this year instead of shopping.

## **Summer Stories**

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning Julie makes from scratch homemade cookies for the children's lunches. She also makes sure to make extra for all of us to "taste test" before the lunches head out the door.

This year our lunch meat did not come sliced. Every Monday and Wednesday, Matt could be found in the back room slicing the lunch meat and grumbling at the meat slicer. The meat slicer we had was not made for the amount of meat we would cut at one time. And by had, I mean one day, Matt took it off the counter, put it on the floor and said "It is garbage." We are now searching for a used commercial meat slicer for next year.

Matt may have been grumbling in the pantry slicing meat, but in the kitchen Matthew and Eric were enjoying each other's company while doing their part in preparing the days hot meal. Eric would come with the day's really bad joke to share with Matthew then Matthew would let Eric know just how bad it was.

One week I forgot to order lunch meat. Instead of worrying I decided we would just have peanut butter and jelly in the brown bag lunches that week. Well, the sandwich makers that week let me know that putting a slice of meat and cheese on a bun was much easier than making 270 something PB & J sandwiches.

Our friends from Solid Rock always reminded us to have fun while we worked. Dave would wear his crazy hats. Paul and Robert would take turns bringing the music to play. Singing and dancing would be had by all of us.

This year we celebrated Jodi Noll, Matt Petersen and Missy Bell's 5-year anniversary!

On many occasions this summer we had only a few volunteers show up. Occasionally, I would text the drivers and ask if they could come early to help. Each time they showed up without hesitation.

As the summer came to a close, we still had canned goods from the food drives that were held in the schools and the Geauga County Public Libraries. We sent these items home with children living in the Berkshire School District as they had almost 3 more weeks until school started.

Jobs and Family Services provides a back-to-school day for families that qualify. This service provides back-to-school supplies, haircuts and clothing. Many of our families do not “qualify” and others do “qualify” but are working during the hours it was offered.

I have always felt that people do not donate money to Claridon Community Helps for us to save. They donate money for us to use. Since we would be ending the summer in the black, board members all agreed that we should purchase school supplies for the children to get them off to a good start. In all 17 families asked for assistance with the school supply list.

At the end of the summer, for the first time in 2 years we ended financially in the black. We will begin the summer 2025 with a few thousand dollars carried over from this year. This is possible because of the many food donations we received.

## **In Closing**

Together we are making a difference in the lives of so many families in Geauga County! We have planted the seed of giving within the child. We have relieved a little bit of stress on families without the barriers of fitting the criteria. We live in a wonderful community!

Thank you!

Judi Maloney, Program Director