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Six Millionth Meal Delivered by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs Through the Restaurant Meal Initiative

*In Total, Over 27 Million Home-Delivered Meals Reached Seniors Through Partnerships and
New Initiatives in the Past 18 Months*

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) has delivered its 6 millionth meal through the Florida Restaurant Meal Initiative. The innovative partnership among DOEA, The Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA), 11 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), and more than 100 participating restaurants launched in April 2020 in response to COVID-19.

“The Restaurant Meal Initiative is a prime example of innovation and ingenuity,” said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. “The program originated as a solution to feeding isolated seniors during the pandemic, but the program has remained sustainable because it’s scalable for every community. It continues to provide nutritious meal choices to homebound seniors, and it makes good business sense for restaurants.”

“When the Aging Network started this initiative, we knew we had to have flexibility to work with new vendors—the restaurants—and Governor DeSantis made that easy to accomplish by allowing restaurants to become emergency meal vendors,” said **DOEA Secretary Richard Prudom**. “Now, we’re seeing more and more of the AAAs and their local restaurants establish longer-term business relationships moving into the future. This means the program is working not just for older adults remaining at home, but for everyone involved.”

The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Broward County, one of DOEA’s 11 AAAs, has maintained continuous high-volume, home-delivery meal services since the program began. One of their local contracted restaurants is Offerdahl’s, originating from Weston, Florida.

“This program was a natural fit for us,” said **Offerdahl’s Off-the-Grill restaurant owner and former Miami Dolphin middle linebacker John Offerdahl**. “When we started the program, it was a huge godsend to our business, and it gave us an awesome purpose: to feed the needs of South Florida. It is so much more than food. We prepared and served over 168,000 meals or 12,000 meal kits per week, during the initial launch of the program. Now we are delivering the meal kits to every older adult directly to their home.”

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The 6 million home-delivered meals provided through the Restaurant Meal Initiative are part of the larger number of 27 million meals delivered by DOEA, its 11 AAAs, volunteers, and lead agencies for the past year and a half. Home meal delivery increased by over 200 percent for more than six months last year, and the Aging Network has maintained a significant increase compared to non-pandemic numbers.

DOEA's 11 Area Agencies on Aging throughout the state continue to work with local volunteers and other local service providers to ensure meal delivery to Florida's most vulnerable population. Meal delivery by volunteers and other local organizations also combat social isolation of seniors by providing the simple interaction of food delivery to the doorstep of an elder.

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About the Florida Department of Elder Affairs

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the State Unit on Aging, helps Florida's elders to remain healthy, safe, and independent. The Department provides most direct services through its Division of Statewide Community-Based Services, which works through the state's 11 Area Agencies on Aging and local service providers to deliver essential services to a vital segment of the population. For more information, please visit www.elderaffairs.org.