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Dave Wight, a member of Blue Knights Maine Chapter 1, with meals packed for distribution through the Good Shepherd Food Bank. Photo courtesy of Sherrie Wight

Honors College, local community members donate 10K meals to Good Shepherd Food Bank

April 21, 2020

The Maine Day Meal Packout (MDMP), now in its fourth year, has contributed more than 250,000 meals to food pantries across Maine. Coordinated by the Honors College Student Advisory Board at the University of Maine, the MDMP team was planning on donating another 75,000 meals before the event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the leadership of senior Honors biomedical engineering major, Lauren Ryan, the team raised close to \$25,000 from fundraisers, grants, and campus and community donors to purchase the meals, which would have been packed on Maine Day.

“COVID-19 is impacting many people in many different ways, and a large percentage of Mainers are now out of work and in need of assistance more now than ever,” says Ryan, who mobilized the MDMP team to adapt their outreach to suit current circumstances.

When The Outreach Program, the Massachusetts-based organization that supplies the food and runs the packout, offered to pack meals for the MDMP, Ryan and other team members jumped at the chance to help food insecure Mainers. With the assistance of Blue Knights Maine Chapter 1 members Sherrie and Dave Wight, local supporters of the MDMP, the team delivered 10,000 meals to the Good Shepherd Food Bank's Hampden warehouse for local distribution.

The Wights, along with several volunteers from other New England states, met up with members of The Outreach Program in New Hampshire, where they picked up the meals destined for Maine. Sherrie Wight recalled the pickup process as one grounded in teamwork and mutual aid.

“We all helped load each other's vehicles one state at a time,” she said.

Sherrie Wight acknowledged why she and her husband chose to take on the challenge of picking up and transporting the meals.

“It wasn't a hard choice. In fact, it wasn't a choice at all,” she said. “It was the only thing to do because it had to be done. We feel so blessed and fortunate. We have a roof over our heads and food on our table. Others do not and, in this especially trying time, their struggle just to survive is magnified.”

Sherrie Wight was equally inspired by the Honors College students.

“It wasn't the meal packout they had envisioned, but they figured out a way to get some meals here at this incredibly difficult time when they are needed more than ever,” she said. “They never gave up, never stopped dreaming of what was possible. When our young people show that kind of determination and perseverance in the face of extreme adversity, they have become our teachers.”

The response of the MDMP team and local partners like the Wights demonstrates the flexibility, innovation and dedication to the common good that are characteristic of the UMaine community. MDMP food bank liaison and second-year Honors political science major Dominique DiSpirito noted that, despite the number of cancellations and the atmosphere of uncertainty that COVID-19 has produced, this experience reminded her that “compassion isn't canceled.”

The Honors College is thanking donors to the meal packout on a [webpage](#).

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