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November 16, 2007

Governor Eliot Spitzer
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Spitzer:

Thank you for the opportunity to present to your Budget Division Staff the needs of seniors in our community.

Meals on Wheels provides nearly **850,000 meals** to more than **3,100 homebound and disabled individuals** on an annual basis. More than **2,000 volunteers** help serve these meals. Meals on Wheels has been notified by our current meal provide that they will cease operations at the present facility due to multiple deficiencies including health and safety issues. In order to ensure uninterrupted service to our meal recipients, an alternative site must be secured and operational by **June 2009**. The boards of Meals on Wheels have implemented a plan to meet this deadline.

To ascertain the degree to which this \$7.5 million project is needed and vital to the community, MOW engaged in a 24 month planning process. What is critical in this context is that MOW identified a profound need, with their current food production vendor and nationally recognized food production consultant, to no longer prepare meals at the current food production facility which was built in 1900 and is suffering from countless deficiencies. In addition, it was documented in a report to the MOW Board that the kitchen equipment is sorely outdated and the current conditions at the existing commissary marginally adequate and cannot meet the needs of the community's growing aging population.

Knowing that thousands of Western New Yorkers will benefit from this project, and the reality that MOW's food vendor (Sodexo) will not enter into another lease at the current facility, the MOW Foundation has committed seed money in the amount of \$1 Million to move the project forward and has begun the process to launch a capital campaign. They have also been pre-approved for gap financing. Subsequently, MOW was invited by the WNY Grantmakers Association, led by the Community Health Foundation and John R. Oishei Foundation to begin a dialog of financial need and potential investment.

Clearly, the influence and outcomes of this initiative will be long term, substantial and sustainable and will shape the Region's ability to provide nutritional food services to low-income frail elderly, special needs persons, and underserved markets. This new

Touching Lives with Food and Friendship.

food service infrastructure will at a minimum deliver benefits that will exponentially improve the quality of life and the well being of those we serve. It is well documented that nutrition programs save tax dollars by delaying and avoiding costly institutional care. According to Oxford Health Systems, Brooklyn, NY, for every \$1 spent on nutrition, \$3.25 is saved on healthcare costs.

The CP is being designed to prepare and distribute a minimum of 1.2 million meals annually. Additionally, the new facility will enhance and stabilize the process to merge like-minded organizations (Meals on Wheels) and to directly deliver essential emergency / disaster relief services in concert with the American Red Cross and Food Bank of WNY. As documented in a signed agreement with the aforementioned organizations, the new site will become the initial first responder in the distribution of emergency food.

Over the next ten years the number of seniors in need of nutrition services will increase significantly due to a growing frail elderly population and ongoing high poverty and health issues in Erie County, especially within the City of Buffalo. On a parallel path, data reinforces that health and education are the largest growing employment sectors in Western New York and currently face an alarming shortage of qualified workers.

Because of this, a thoughtful and strategic school-to-work training program is being developed with local universities and colleges. Its overarching goal will be to support asset based, targeted activities, in partnership with community partners that address the urgent, multidirectional urban problems of nutrition and health, workforce development and economic development. Two key concepts drive the design and ultimate success of this project: (1) the notion that partners should do what they do best; and, (2) an educated, informed and empowered public is essential to creating and sustaining employment and volunteer opportunities. We are working with local area agencies on aging and other Meals on Wheels programs to build a consortium of meal providers.

Also paramount to the success of this pivotal initiative is to sustain and build new collaborative and outcome based relationships that will be central to the CP. Current initiatives include the American Red Cross, Food Bank of WNY, Erie County Departments of Senior and Social Services; Erie County Department of Disaster Preparedness, US Department of Homeland Security, 19 MOW Distribution Sites throughout WNY, AIDS Community Services, Network in Aging of WNY, RSVP, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Community Health Foundation, Volunteer Administrators of WNY, University of Buffalo Schools of Public Health, Gerontology and Social Work, D'Youville College, Erie Community College, Buffalo State College and Meals on Wheels Association of America. With the advent of the CP, MOW is also aggressively reaching out to integrate after school programs, child/adult daycares and residential programs into its preparation and distribution infrastructure.

It is important to note that the leadership of MOW has fervently embraced this important project. They envision the CP to be a catalyst and long-term project that successfully links with a variety of resources through the hospitality, food service, nutrition and frail elderly services and professions. They also recognize that they cannot do it alone which is why they have proactively brought together a committed team of individuals and entities, which include representation from private industry, government, food service, other meal providers, higher education, public education, social service providers, faith-based communities and others who collectively realize their vision to construct a new CP that incorporates the most current and improved practices for production, packaging and delivery of hot and cold meals.

This multi-purpose food production/education facility will not only provide current and future elderly meal recipients and others with the critical services they require; but, powered by collaborations with multiple partners will also offer the entire region a dynamic meal production and training facility with real solutions to ensure safety and quality standards and a training institute anticipated to become a replicable national model.

Evidence is mounting that a vibrant NYS economy will require new forms of cooperation and coordination. We believe that the diverse stakeholders MOW has drawn together will improve the economic performance of our organization and maximize the effectiveness of economic investment in MOW. Our hope is that you will agree that our strategies to consolidate local food preparation facilities and other nutrition programs to create new revenue streams and cost savings is worthy of your investment.

If you require further information or clarification, please contact Ben Gair at 716.822.2201. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Gair", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Benjamin A. Gair, III
Executive Director