

MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS, B2

# HERALD NEWS

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# A little help

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Photos by AMY NEWMAN/Herald News

Joseph Sidor, 76, brings groceries to Nick Frannicola, 49, who is homebound. At top left, Sidor picks out Frannicola's groceries, something the volunteer shopper does once a week. Sidor, at top right, carries the goods inside.

## PASSAIC COUNTY

# Volunteer shoppers reach out to homebound

**"It's such a little thing to do. They are so grateful."**

MARY ANN VECCHIONE,  
volunteer shopper

### ON THE NET

Log on to [northjersey.com/holiday07](http://northjersey.com/holiday07) for video, photos and links to celebrate the holiday season.

By HEATHER HADDON  
Herald News

Mary Ann Vecchione gets the most sustenance from the food she buys but never eats.

Once a week, the retired teacher from Little Falls picks up a few bags of groceries for an 86-year-old Holocaust survivor in Clifton. A volunteer shopper, Vecchione drives over to the Daughters of Miriam Center, unpacks the groceries, and then plays her larger role: providing support for a homebound senior too frail and frightened to leave her apartment alone.

"It's such a little thing to do," said Vecchione, 66, who made 90 volunteer shopping trips for two women this year. "They are so grateful. It's very rewarding."

For more than a decade, Home Care Options, a nonprofit home health agency in Paterson, has run the shopping program to help seniors and disabled

people remain in their homes. It's the only program of its kind in Passaic County, according to Mary Kuzinski, director of the county's senior services.

This year, 50 volunteer shoppers made almost 2,000 trips for homebound residents in Passaic County, said Virginia Statile, volunteer coordinator for Home Care Options. At least twice a month, volunteers pick up a list, money and coupons from their clients. They then deliver the groceries and some companionship.

Many volunteers are retired and want to do something for their neighbors. Others still work as landscapers, pharmacists, social workers and college administrators, Statile said. Typically, those who volunteer say the appreciation they get far outweighs the effort of carrying more grocery bags.

"These are independent people who don't want to leave their homes," said Barbara Severini-Cole-

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AMY NEWMAN/Herald News

Joseph Sidor, 76, left, shows Nick Frannicola the fresh strawberries he bought for the 49-year-old homebound man. As a volunteer shopper, Sidor purchases groceries for two people. He estimates he makes 50 to 60 grocery trips for them a year.

## Shoppers: Helping the homebound

# Shoppers: Helping the homebound

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man, a 52-year-old accountant from North Haledon, who shops for two homebound women in Hawthorne. "This is where there are happy and comfortable. They just need a little help."

Assistance for the homebound is becoming more essential as growth in the elderly population outpaces services available to them. A decade ago, Medicaid typically reimbursed home health care agencies for five days of care to a shut-in senior. Now, the benefit has scaled back to two days, said Statile.

"It's been cut back so much, (the aides) don't have any time to do shopping," said Statile, who directed the Visiting Homemaker Service of Hudson County for 33 years. Some of Home Care Options' clients have Meals On Wheels, but that doesn't provide breakfast, snacks or cleaning supplies, she said.

Some of the program's 65 clients have children who live far away. Some have no remaining friends or relatives. Others have children who say they are too busy to make weekly grocery trips for their parents. About four months ago, one woman gave the name of a local priest as her only emergency contact.

In Passaic County, 12 percent of the 497,000 residents were 65 years or older, according to 2006 Census estimates. More than a third was also disabled.

Requests for volunteer shopping come from area social workers and the county's hotline for seniors. Nationwide, social service providers are scrambling to keep up with the growing numbers of seniors who need help to remain in their homes. A 2007 survey of 800 seniors showed that fears of moving into a nursing home or losing their independence



AMY NEWMAN/Herald News

Joseph Sidor reads over Nick Frannicola's grocery list to make sure he didn't forget an item.

trumped even death as a concern.

After having back surgery four months ago, Emily Pointek sought shopping assistance so she could stay in her Paterson home. Now, twice a month, Santa Vasquez, also of Paterson, brings the independent 82-year-old cold cuts, celery, chicken and other staples.

One Saturday when Pointek forgot to ring up her shopper with a grocery list, Vasquez called to check up on her. "She said, *Mami*, are you OK?" recalled Pointek, who bought Vasquez a nativity set for Christmas. "After that call, I cried. I thought that was so wonderful."

Statile encourages shoppers to

form long-lasting companionships. Volunteers have attended recipients' 90th birthday parties, accompanied them to Hanukkah celebrations and brought macaroons for Christmas. One Clifton woman made Jack McNamara a Christmas stocking. Her daughter made a donation to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in his name.

"She would say how wonderful I was," said McNamara, a 67-year-old retired banker from Clifton. "I would say, 'You are really giving me a big head.'"

Some clients call Statile to ask if they can pay the volunteers. She gently dissuades them.

"So many people are complete-

## HOW TO HELP

**Home Care** Options, of Paterson, seeks volunteers to shop for homebound elderly and disabled Passaic County residents.

**The program** pairs volunteers with nearby residents for weekly or biweekly shopping trips.

**To volunteer**, call Virginia Statile at (973) 523-1224.

ly alone," Statile said. "They say, 'Thank God that you called.'"

Reach Heather Haddon at 973-569-7121 or [haddon@northjersey.com](mailto:haddon@northjersey.com).