

# THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

## Your Health Matters

### Nutrition for the seriously sick

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### Food Outreach provides lifeline for people living with AIDS or cancer

By Sandra Jordan Of the St. Louis American

For someone living with a serious illness, good nutrition sometimes falls between the cracks as patients struggle through weakness, loss of appetite, taking medicine, paying bills and other difficulties.

Food Outreach in St. Louis provides a sense of normalcy by giving healthy food and nutritious, heart-healthy meals at no cost to thousands of low-income clients living with HIV/AIDS or cancer. They also have food programs in Belleville and Granite City.

"The majority of our clients are African-American. With our HIV program, it's probably 58 percent. With our cancer, it's probably like 52 percent - but it is more than half," said Executive Director Greg Lukeman.

"Sixty-five percent of clients are living at the federal poverty level. We've never had a waiting list for services. We are the only AIDS agency in St. Louis where people can walk off the street and have services as long as they can prove their status."

The operation is sustained through donations. Its main annual fundraiser, "A Tasteful Affair," will be held April 20 at the Khorassan Ballroom at the Chase Park Plaza.

Kenny Martin became a client eight years ago following a series of illnesses and a serious hospitalization related to a positive HIV diagnosis.

"My doctor put me on a diet because my lungs were collapsing. Dr. Matthew German - he hooked me up with Food Outreach," Martin said.

Food Outreach clients range in age from 3 to 93 and live in 137 ZIP codes in a 200-mile radius in Missouri and Illinois. Clients may pick up groceries at the Midtown location, or volunteers deliver prepared meals and groceries to the homes of men and women who are too sick to pick up their own food or to cook for themselves.

At first, Martin wasn't strong enough to pick up his groceries, to cook or even move around very well. He used the Food Outreach monthly menu and called in his order.

"They delivered it to my house. When I got strong enough, I would pick up my own food. I only use it when I need it," Martin said.

Eight years later, Martin is taking less medication now and volunteering at Doorways, a residential facility for persons living with HIV/AIDS. He has not been hospitalized since that bout in 2000, a blessing due to faith, support, health care and needed nutrition.

An onsite dietician is one of the first points of contact who conducts tests to determine whether there is muscle wasting, which is prevalent in cancer and HIV/AIDS patients.

“We test for muscle mass, extra-cellular mass and fat mass and run it through software and fax the results to the doctor,” said Josh Dale, dietitian at Food Outreach.

“With HIV, there are certain drugs that require certain foods to be effective. Some have to be taken on a full stomach to help with absorption. We can use our food to help patients tolerate their medicines,” Lukeman said.

Lukeman said some HIV drugs are protease inhibitors, which can cause diabetes. Although everything on Food Outreach menus are usually high-protein, heart-healthy and trans-fat-free, they can adjust the menu based on the needs of the client.

“The menu can be tailored to be a diabetic diet and we work with Josh to see what other things they can do to keep diabetes in check,” Lukeman said.

“With secondary nutritional challenges, counseling becomes more important.”

Food Outreach began serving cancer patients three years ago.

“When you go through cancer treatment, your taste buds change. Having a choice is very important,” said Karen Moody, community affairs officer at Food Outreach.

All clients thoroughly enjoy having a choice in the food selection - just like in a grocery store.

Seventy-three year old Doretha Shannon of St. Louis has faced cancer three times, once with colon cancer and twice with breast cancer. She has been a home delivery client since 2005.

“What I like about it, you can order it - it’s not like something you don’t want,” Shannon said. She learned about the program through the Siteman Cancer Center.

“I was bedridden when I started receiving food. The home health assistant cleaned and cooked for me and would go to the store and all of that,” she said.

Shannon said her weight has stabilized and she is feeling well enough to cook her own meals. Her cancer is in remission although she is working through other health issues.

With only \$40 worth of food stamps to sustain her, Food Outreach has been a godsend.

“I’m on a very limited budget - \$500 a month total, and I’m on 13 or 14 different kinds of medicines, and I tell you this is a big help,” Shannon said.

“Honey, I tell you - it’s a blessing.”

To volunteer or get more information on Food Outreach, call 314-652-FOOD (3663) or visit [www.foodoutreach.org](http://www.foodoutreach.org).