

Meals On Wheels For Sephardic Seniors

By Boruch Shubert

What happens when a person becomes homebound due to serious illness or the frailties of advanced age? Too often they have to rely on the sporadic availability of others to help them obtain their daily nutritional intake.

Fortunately for homebound seniors living in the Sephardic community around Ocean Parkway, in Brooklyn, NY, the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island's (JCCGCI's) Ocean Parkway Senior Center, housed at Ahi Ezer, oversees a Meals on Wheels (MOW) program that has earned acclaim for its premium levels of service and adherence to kosher standards required by the Sephardic rabbinate.

Operating out of the expansive, state-of-the-art kitchen of the JCCGCI's Ocean Parkway Senior Center, the Meals on Wheels program produces hundreds of hot,

full-course lunches each day, under the strict kosher supervision of Rabbi Shaul Maslaton, Rav of Congregation Ahi Ezer, and Rabbi Yechiel Babad of Tartikov.

"All of the food for our Meals on Wheels program is prepared in conformance with the high *kashrus* standards and specific preferences of our Orthodox Sephardic clientele," states Rabbi Maslaton. "This encompasses *chalav Yisrael*, *pas* and *bishul Yisrael*, and *beit Yosef shechita*."

According to Rabbi Maslaton, the program's many staff members – including its coordinator, Solomon Dayan, as well as most of its drivers and delivery people – are of Sephardic heritage.

"As Sephardim, they have a natural capacity to be culturally sensitive and intuitively understanding of our clientele's needs," he stated.

This popular program of home-delivered meals was recently in serious danger of being consolidated with other such

programs as part of the city's restructuring of its home delivered meals program – a change that would have jeopardized its ability to properly cater to the unique expectations of the local Sephardic community.

However, as a result of the vigorous efforts of local officials (Assemblyman Cymbrowitz, Councilman Recchia and especially Councilman Michael C. Nelson and his staff), local rabbis and community leaders, New York City's Department for the Aging – which funds Meals on Wheels – has allowed the JCCGCI's Ocean Parkway Senior Center to continue operating the program independently and in full accordance with its constituents' religious sensibilities.

Residents who live in the Sephardic community around Ocean Parkway are eligible to receive home-delivered meals through the Meals on Wheels program if they are 60 years of age or older; physically and/or mentally incapacitated and in need of some assistance; unable to prepare nutritious meals by themselves and have no friends or family to do it for them. Recipients of Medicaid home and personal care services are currently ineligible for home-delivered meals. Anyone who wishes to obtain information on how to apply for this program should call 718-627-2500, ext. 215.