



MARION SENIOR SERVICES ANNOUNCES DINING SITE CLOSURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Marion Transit and Meals on Wheels Program Will Remain Open

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCALA, Fla. (March 17, 2020) – To assist in the ongoing international effort to protect individuals and communities during the COVID-19 outbreak, Marion Senior Services (MSS) will temporarily close its congregate dining sites, effective Tuesday, March 17 at 5 p.m. and continuing for a forecasted period of eight weeks. Throughout this process, MSS will reassess the ability to reopen based on contemporary circumstances in North Central Florida and beyond. People are encouraged to check MSS' website and social media channels for any adjustments and announcements regarding this matter.

“Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of the clients we serve, and we take our responsibility as Marion County’s chief social agency for the elderly population seriously,” said Jennifer Martinez, Executive Director of Marion Senior Services. “With that in mind, and after close consultation with public health experts and city and state officials, we knew that an immediate, temporary closure was the best decision to make, and one which we did not take lightly.”

All MSS staff and subcontractors have been thoroughly trained in using universal precautions regarding COVID-19. For the comfort and safety of all visitors, volunteers, subcontractors, and team members, MSS has heightened housekeeping protocols and increased the availability of hand sanitizers, gloves, and disinfectant products throughout the office. There will continue to be staff available to answer questions and handle concerns via telephone, but effective Monday, March 23, the office will be closed for outside visitors until further notice.

“Marion Senior Services has diligently followed – and is adequately prepared to steer through – any effects that COVID-19 can or will have on our community’s elderly population,” said Martinez. “We will continue to work in tandem with local, statewide, and regional leaders and organizations to monitor and assess any issues that arise and implement any and all possible assistance to our clients for their continued protection and wellbeing.”

Presently, two of MSS' leading programs, Marion Transit Services and home-delivered meals (Meals on Wheels), will remain open but with enhanced safety measures in place. For the public transportation side, precautions have and will continue to be taken for the safety of the drivers and recipients. Drivers will have their temperatures checked daily before departure, buses are being disinfected daily, and the capacity for total riders at any one time has been implemented at ten people. For home-delivered meals, the delivery staff has been newly trained on ways to still provide this essential service while limiting client contact to a minimum. For those pre-existing clients of the Congregate Meal Program, an option has been created for them to come to select dining sites (Dunnellon,

Forest, Marion Café, Marion Oaks) to pick up their prepared meal, but in a curbside manner only.

Other changes of note include:

- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program will still be available at normal pick-up times at respective sites as well as at the MSS office on Thursday, March 19, with a curbside service being implemented.
- MSS staff charged with the screening and assessment of clients will perform care plan reviews via telephone, and extended time has been allowed to complete in-home annual reassessments.

“Given the rapidly changing nature of the outbreak, we will regularly reassess the dining sites’ temporary closure – as well as the vitality of all our other programs – in the coming days and weeks and will share updates as they become available,” said Martinez. “This is an extraordinary time for all of us and we appreciate the understanding, patience and support of everyone as we all work through this together as one community looking out for one another.”

About Marion Senior Services

Marion Senior Services, Inc., (MSS) assists the disabled and disadvantaged elderly residents of Marion County, Fla. to maintain independent living status by providing [transportation](#), [nutrition](#), and [in-home support](#) services. MSS is the county’s lead agency for the [Department of Elder Affairs](#), impacting lives and creating change in our communities [since 1973](#). In addition, MSS (operating as Marion Transit Services) has been the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) in Marion County since 1982. The chief services provided by MSS include adult day care, in-home and in-facility respite, home-delivered meals, emergency alert response, personal care, homemaking, nutrition education, case management, and emergency energy assistance. For more information, please call 352.620.3501 or visit MarionSeniorServices.org

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