

Still serving, just in a different way: Erica Padilla-Chavez will move from PVP SA to Second Harvest Food Bank



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Source: [Lookout Santa Cruz](#)

APR 21, 2022 | 12:59 PM



Erica Padilla-Chavez. (Via PFW Consulting)

Erica Padilla-Chavez, CEO of Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance, will be leaving her position to assume the role of CEO at Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County. She will be replacing [Willy Elliott-McCrea](#), who served as CEO for more than 30 years.

Padilla-Chavez has served as CEO of PVPSA since 2015, transforming the organization into a vital South County service.

"Under her leadership, she has taken this organization from a staff of 20 serving about 2,500 children at two small locations into a staff of over 65 serving over 7,000 students and families with three locations including the state-of-the-art Mayou Family Counseling Center," Watsonville Mayor Jimmy Dutra said in a news release. "To say she is leaving PVPSA better than she found it is an understatement."

Padilla-Chavez said she has nothing but gratitude for PVPSA.

"I am honored to have been a service to PVPSA over the years," she said. "I thank them for giving me the opportunity to work in the manner that I've been allowed to work with such a stellar team of people."

Padilla-Chavez says improving people's lives has always been her calling — and the nonprofit sector is the best place to do that.

"I've always looked at my role as one of convening, building partnerships and building relationships," she said. "I've worked in both big county organizations and nonprofits, and while both have their value, working in the nonprofit sector gives a wider opportunity to be creative in ways that sometimes the bureaucracy itself may not lend itself to."

Though Second Harvest's services are a bit different from those of PVPSA, their main goals are the same.

"Health and wellness can be addressed from many different angles, so this particular move to Second Harvest is not far-fetched when I think about what I've been able to do in my career," she said. "It's all connected to advancing public health, and Second Harvest is public health work."



'A pillar of truth and clarity' calls it a career: Second Harvest CEO Elliott-McCrea set to retire



Suzanne Willis, chief development officer for Second Harvest Santa Cruz County, said the search for a CEO began late last summer, but once the organization met with Padilla-Chavez, she was the clear first choice.

"She blew everyone away. After her interview, the decision was completely unanimous that she was the one," she said. "As we're coming off of our 50th anniversary, we are confident that she is the best person to move us into the next 50 years."

Bob Norton, Second Harvest board trustee and co-chair of the selection committee, agreed.

"All of the final candidates were good candidates, but Erica was the cream of the crop," he said. "We feel, in fact, we know that she is best suited for the role."

Though Padilla-Chavez's local knowledge and nonprofit experience are notable, what really stood out to Norton was her thoughtfulness.

"She is a great listener, she didn't try to fit the answer to what she thought we wanted to hear," he said. "She is obviously a very deep thinker, and that tells a lot about a person and their ability to get stuff done."

Padilla-Chavez will officially depart from PVPSA in late June and is set to begin her role at Second Harvest on July 18.