

## LATEST HEADLINES

# Santa Cruz Warriors, Kaiser pack food for families



Santa Cruz Warriors, Kaiser Permanente and Second Harvest Food Bank staff pack produce to be distributed to families as part of the Warriors' third Swishes for Dishes program. (Nick Sestanovich — Santa Cruz Sentinel)

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**WATSONVILLE** — With the NBA Finals starting next week, basketball is on a lot of people's minds. While the actions on the court are certainly riveting, the behind-the-scenes work of franchises also deserves attention.

For the Santa Cruz Warriors, helping families in need is a slam dunk.

The Warriors' front office staff and Kaiser Permanente employees joined forces for the third year in a row Tuesday to assemble produce bags at Second Harvest Food Bank to distribute more than 58,000

meals to families as part of the Warriors' Swishes for Dishes program.

Swishes for Dishes is a program that originated with the Golden State Warriors' Community Foundation, in which 100 meals are donated through a partnership with Kaiser, Feeding America and The Athletes' Corner for every point the team scores during a season. That program was picked up by Golden State's G League affiliate, the Santa Cruz Warriors, following their 2020-21 season.

This season, the amount of points scored by the Santa Cruz Warriors equated to 58,430 meals, which were assembled at Second Harvest Food Bank's Watsonville office. Since the program began, the Warriors have donated 162,020 meals.

David Kao, the Warriors' chief operating officer, said the numbers were evidence of the power of basketball being able to connect with the community.

"The 85,000-ish families that have food insecurity in Santa Cruz County, however we can lend a hand or provide, it goes beyond basketball," he said.

Approximately six or seven Kaiser employees were on hand to assist. The health care agency has had a longtime relationship with the team, sponsoring the arena on Front Street since the former Dakota Wizards moved to the city in 2012. That partnership was strengthened when Kaiser opened medical offices in the Santa Cruz area starting in 2017.

Joe Foster, Kaiser's public affairs manager, said the agency has partnered with the Warriors on youth programs, senior initiatives and, of course, Swishes for Dishes.

"We're in our third year of bringing it down to Santa Cruz County," he said. "Each year, we've seen an increase in the number we've been able, along with the Warriors, to provide to those in need throughout the community."



(Left to right) Kaiser Permanente Public Affairs Manager Joe Foster, Second Harvest Food Bank CEO Erica Padilla-Chavez and Santa Cruz Warriors COO David Kao pose with a check commemorating the 58,430 meals being distributed during the Warriors' third Swishes for Dishes event. (Nick Sestanovich — Santa Cruz Sentinel)

Erica Padilla-Chavez, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank, said it is an exciting partnership.

"We know that the Warriors play such a huge impact in our lives," she said. "They bring fun and excitement into our community, and to see the Warriors also have a commitment to the community that is in need of nourishment and their intentionality and investing in our efforts and partnering with us, that's huge."

Volunteers formed an assembly line and packed lettuce, carrots, onions, potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, fava beans and other forms of produce into bags to be distributed to families. They also sorted through donations of pantry items and separated donations that were in poor condition or well past their expiration dates. Fittingly, some of the volunteers tossed items into bins from faraway distances like they were basketballs.

The Warriors also presented a check equivalent to the 58,430 meals being distributed.

Padilla-Chavez said the presence of Warriors staffers was a great motivator for others to volunteer.

"If the Warriors can contribute, then all of us can contribute," she said.

Kao said one of the core values of the Warriors franchise is striving for excellence both on and off the court.

"This is hopefully an example of continuing to be excellent off the court," he said.