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OUR TOWN

CABRILLO HOSTS HOLIDAY FOOD DRIVE KICKOFF

Second Harvest Food Bank Goal: 4.5 Million Meals

written by See Below | November 20, 2023



Story and Photos By Jondi Gumz

On Nov. 3, Cabrillo College in Aptos hosted the kickoff of the Second Harvest Food Bank's Holiday Food and Fund Drive, which aims to raise enough money to provide 4.5 million meals.

The location was quite appropriate as Cabrillo College president Matt Wetstein said 20% of students surveyed in October said they had been homeless in the past year and two-thirds reported skipping meals and struggling to find food for themselves and their family.



Ana Rosa (second from right) leads the Cradle to Career moms — (from left) Eva Flores, Maria Cabrera and Lidia Santillan — in a spirited Zumba workout.

Erica Padilla-Chavez, who took over as Second Harvest CEO 18 months ago from Willy Elliott-McCrea, thanked her team and pointed out the new logo on the semi tractor-trailer that served as a backdrop for the kickoff.

The logo features green to represent the agricultural community and the forest, blue to represent precious water resources, and an apple in hand, showing the "commitment to nourishing our community," Padilla-Chavez said.

Last year's goal was 5 million meals, and she had expected a decline in food insecurity with the end of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency. But many are in need of food: 65,000 people seeking help, including 20,000 children.

"We are seeing longer lines at all of our distribution sites," she said.

But she remained upbeat.

"We are going to do this together," she said, introducing Susan True, CEO of Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, and Faris Sabbah, Santa Cruz County superintendent of schools.

True pointed out moms face the rising cost of food due to inflation, but Second Harvest Food Bank can provide three healthy meals for every dollar.

Sabbah said he was excited about youth participating in the campaign.

Dr. Nan Mickiewicz, president of Dominican Hospital, a major sponsor, said, "We see the effects of food insecurity ... poor nutrition and poor health."

The hospital raised 124,000 meals last year and this year's co-chairs, Kyle Middleton and Eric Conrad, have a goal to raise 150,000 — "Challenge accepted," she said.

Santa Cruz City Manager Matt Huffaker, a Second Harvest board member, said the need for the food drive skyrocketed in the past three years of the pandemic.



He offered a friendly wager to his successor in Watsonville, City Manager Rene Mendez, saying if Watsonville, population 51,500, raised more than Santa Cruz, population 61,800, then he, Huffaker, would do a polar plunge off the Santa Cruz Wharf into the ocean.

"How could I say no?" responded Mendez, adding, "I'm going to need a lot of heavy lifting to beat Santa Cruz."

Chris Weiler, race director for the Silicon Valley Leadership Group Foundation Turkey Trot on Thanksgiving Day, said as long as Santa Cruz supports the Turkey Trot, "we are going to keep supporting you."

The foundation has given the food bank between \$60,000 and \$90,000 a year from this 5K and 10K event.

Kristen Brown, Capitola City Council member and vice president government relations for the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said she will run the Turkey Trot "to support our food bank."

Also running: Erica Padilla-Chavez and her family.

To sign up, go to www.svturkeytrot.com

Pastor Rene Schlaepfer of Twin Lakes Church in Aptos, which raised more than 1 million meals last year, explained how to run a successful holiday drive.

Set a goal, show the need, explain who is helped, seniors, working single moms, families with one parent in prison and immigrant families. And have a countdown to build excitement.

One success story from the past: A young boy by the name of Travis brought paper kites to sell and collected names with a promise to make paper kites for those folks. He raised \$2,000 — he's now in college, Pastor Rene said.

New technology — such as a QR code for your team — to deliver donations swiftly can help.

In Live Oak, the moms in the Cradle to Career initiative not only support food distribution but also started a Zumba exercise group and wanted to show their moves.

Ana Rosa, Eva Flores, Maria Cabrera and Lidia Santillan got some folks in the audience — and Erica Padilla-Chavez—to start dancing to the lively Latin music.

Finally David Kao, chief operating officer of the Santa Cruz Warriors, said the team raised 162,000 meals in the last three years by scoring baskets.

This is called Swishes for Dishes.

For every point made, the Santa Cruz Warriors will give 10 meals — and with this year's roster, Cao hopes to donate 50,000 meals.

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To donate to Second Harvest Food Bank's Holiday Food and Fund Drive, visit thefoodbank.org.

[Link to original story.](#)