



OUR TOWN

EXTREME GENEROSITY AT TIME OF NEED

Holiday Food & Fund Drive Shatters Second Harvest Records Again

written by See Below | March 17, 2025



On March 6, in a powerful show of solidarity, Santa Cruz County donors came together at a time to support Second Harvest Food Bank's largest-ever fundraising event.

Generosity Times Publishing Group Inc tpgonlinedaily.comAs federal food assistance programs face unprecedented cuts, the Holiday Food & Fund Drive Awards Dinner shattered records, ensuring that millions of meals will reach families in need.

Chaired by Dr. Faris Sabbah, Santa Cruz County superintendent of schools, and Chris Murphy, president of the Santa Cruz Warriors, the sold-out event at Hotel Paradox showcased the deep commitment of local leaders, businesses, and residents to fighting hunger in their community.

"As we navigate uncertain times and the looming threats to federal funding, the generosity of our community is more important than ever," said Erica Padilla-Chavez, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County.

Padilla-Chavez Continued: "Every contribution reflects not just a commitment to ending hunger, but a

deep belief in the dignity of every individual. We are profoundly grateful for our partners' continued support in ensuring that no one in Santa Cruz County goes without the nourishment they deserve."

Inspired by her passionate leadership, Mari Rossi, a philanthropist and dedicated donor in Scotts Valley, took a bold stand, offering a surprise cash match donation and challenging attendees to step up in support.

Her call to action was met with enthusiasm, as The Seaside Company, better known as the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Assemblymember Gail Pellerin, and several other community members and local organizations answered the challenge, collectively raising an additional \$30,000.



This remarkable show of support comes as Second Harvest Food Bank prepares for what is expected to be a difficult year for funding amid federal food assistance cuts. Such support underscores the power of community-driven action in the fight against hunger.

This momentum builds on the incredible generosity of the Santa Cruz County community during the holiday season.

From Nov. 7, 2024, through Jan. 15, 2025, the Santa Cruz County community raised the equivalent of 5,224,998 nutritious meals.

Every dollar contributed directly supports food-insecure residents, reinforcing the power of collective action in fighting hunger.

Individual Awards

Recognized as Second Harvest Food Bank's Hunger Fighters of the Year, Vinita Fernandes and Diana Valdez exemplify dedication to combating hunger.

Vinita has spent over a decade rescuing and distributing food through Grey Bears and St. Joseph's Church, ensuring seniors, the homeless, and disaster evacuees receive nourishment with dignity.

Diana's initiative at Live Oak Elementary has grown into a vital program serving over 100 families bi-monthly, showcasing the transformative power of community commitment.



Local businesses and organizations also played pivotal roles in the fundraiser's success, including Twin Lakes Church, Boardwalk Bowl, UC Santa Cruz, Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, Dominican Hospital, Sequoia Wealth Advisors, Santa Cruz Montessori, and Park Avenue Fitness.

Individual community members Gun Ruder of S. Martinelli & Co., County of Santa Cruz's Caitlin Smith and Adam Spickler, and community member John FitzGibbon were commended for their significant contributions as well.

While large donations made a substantial impact, the collective effort

This united community effort embodies the spirit of compassion that defines Santa Cruz County.

Looking ahead, Chris Murphy and Karl J. Rice, president and CEO of the Santa Cruz Seaside Company, will serve as co-chairs for the 2025-26 Holiday Food & Fund Drive and hope to raise even more meals next year.

With current and potential funding cuts, Second Harvest Food Bank plans to launch a campaign to bridge the gap. So stay tuned for those details.

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TOP PHOTO: People feeling good about helping Second Harvest Food Bank at awards dinner at Hotel Paradox.



[Link to original story.](#)