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## Reflecting on a Career of Service



This month, Lisa Berkowitz is capping off her stellar four-decade career with Meals on Wheels.

Lisa has worked at Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County for the past 44 years. She was first hired in 1979 as the food service director of Golden Age Nutrition Program, the predecessor to

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County, just three years after the program was founded.

Under Lisa’s leadership as program director, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County surpassed 10 million meals served since its founding. Lisa’s determination has ensured the program never misses a meal, even throughout the floods of 1982, earthquake of 1989, recession in 2009, pandemic and wildfires of 2020, recent cost inflation, and atmospheric river storms and floods of the past year.

With a small-but-committed team of 16 employees, along with more than 50 fervent volunteers, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County nourishes our county’s elders through meals delivered to their homes and served at four dining sites.

Lisa was inspired by her grandparents to dedicate her career to supporting older adults. She moved to California to help take care of her grandfather after graduating from Ohio State University.

“It is important for a community to value all of its members, including those who have made so many contributions during their lifetime,” Lisa said.

A large part of her work has been cultivating volunteers to support Meals on Wheels and ensuring every older adult in need is supported, without being placed on a waitlist. Without these volunteers, the program simply would not be able to meet the needs of our community’s growing older adult population.

“Santa Cruz County is an amazing place to live and work. I hope we continue making progress in ensuring that all members of our community are healthy, supported, and provided the opportunity to live a life with independence and dignity,” Lisa said.

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## Taking the Lead

### News & Notes

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County continues to work with the Live Oak School District toward a two-year lease extension for the Live Oak Senior Center, which has served as our headquarters since 1976.

Rest assured that home-delivered meals will continue to be served and congregate dining sites will continue to operate.



*Darren Daley joined Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County in July and has hit the ground running.*

## **Meals on Wheels Welcomes New Program Director**

I am excited to join Community Bridges as the new program director for Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

After more than a decade working in community development overseas, I'm thrilled to return to the Central Coast to support my community, especially the older adults of Santa Cruz County. With significant increases in the cost of living, it is imperative that we as a community work together to ensure food security for the rapidly growing older adult population.

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County faces many challenges. More than 1,500 older adults in our community rely on the program for food security, and a majority are isolated and disabled elders living below the poverty line.

The number of participants who need meals delivered to their homes doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that increase has caused our operating costs to balloon. At the same time, the population of older adults in Santa Cruz County is

We will keep you updated through the process.

### **In the Press**

Click the headlines below to read local news about Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County and older adult services.

- [Santa Cruz County is graying and the impending silver tsunami is coming — Lookout Santa Cruz](#)
- [Global nonprofit leader named new Santa Cruz County Meals on Wheels director — Santa Cruz Sentinel](#)
- [Top 10 volunteer opportunities in Santa Cruz County: August 2023 — Lookout Santa Cruz](#)

continuing to grow. According to census data, the age 65-84 population has grown faster in Santa Cruz County than anywhere else in California since 2010. However, local, state, and federal funding for the program has steadily dissipated or remained stagnant at levels set in the 1980s.

Together, we can continue to overcome these challenges.

In the past year alone, our dedicated staff and team of volunteers at Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County delivered more than 150,000 meals to the homes of elders in our community who are otherwise unable to meet their nutritional needs. We served another 37,000 hot and fresh meals at our four dining sites throughout the county and at the Elderday site.

With your support, we can continue helping our community's elders stay independent with dignity in their homes.

—Darren Daley

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## Updating Our Menus

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County welcomes Yaza Shafai as our new director of kitchen services.

Yaza attended the Culinary Institute of America in New York and holds a bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant management. Along with her education and training, she worked in San Francisco restaurants for more than 12 years. When many restaurants shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Yaza brought her passion for food to working as a certified postpartum doula. She worked closely with people on ensuring proper nutrition after they gave birth.

"That role allowed me to have a much closer connection to people in my community and to provide for them through cooking. I knew that I wanted to turn that into a career," Yaza said.

She joined Meals on Wheels this summer as the program's first director of kitchen services in nearly two decades. She is working closely with the new program director, Darren Daley, to refresh



*Yaza Shafai is Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County's first director of kitchen services in nearly two decades.*

menus and continue delighting local elders while meeting their nutritional needs.

Yaza oversees the four dining sites in Ben Lomond, Live Oak, Santa Cruz, and Watsonville, along with the dining at Elderday, where we offer daily hot meals to adults 60 and up. All of the more than 750 meals served at those dining sites each week are prepared by chefs in the program's central kitchen. Yaza also leads the coordination of the more than 50 volunteers who transport meals from the kitchen to the dining sites and deliver around 3,500 meals each week to participants' homes.

Working closely with the program's registered dietician, Yaza and Darren are reviewing the dining site and home-delivered meal menus to find ways of adding even more variety and customization, including additional options for people with dietary restrictions.

"I am in recipe-development mode," Yaza said. "My goal is to have some fun new recipes for our participants to try. They are ultimately the best taste testers out there, and we always look forward to their feedback."

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## Thank you for your ongoing support. Your kindness is transforming our community.

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