



More Than Three Decades with Meals on Wheels: 'I get more out of it than I give'



Kathleen Kearns, right, has devoted more than three decades of her life to Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

How Kathleen Kearns has continued to give to her community

Kathleen Kearns grew up in a family dedicated to helping people. That influenced her decision to pursue a career in social work, which led to more than thirty years of service with Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

"Community Bridges and what it stands for is part of how I live my life," she said.

Kathleen started as an on-call driver with Meals on Wheels in 1986. As she spent more time with the program, she had the opportunity to take on roles including dispatching drivers and managing dining sites in Live Oak and at the London Nelson Community Center in Santa Cruz.

She is now an assistant home delivery program manager, where she leads initial home visits for new participants in the Watsonville area to evaluate their eligibility for the program, along with coordinating visits twice a year to the homes of current participants. The visits are also an opportunity to help participants with any referrals to other services that might benefit them.

Given her breadth of experience over the years, Kathleen is always happy to help fill in for other positions across Meals on Wheels. She considers herself fortunate to have had so many years with the program. "Community Bridges has lifted me up to all these different opportunities and has encouraged me," she said.

As she approaches 80 years of age, Kathleen has developed an even deeper rapport with the older adults the program serves, since they see her as one of them.

"It is just absolutely lovely to be able to have that kind of communication with the people that we serve," she said, "I get more out of it than I give."

Support Meals and Connections for Our Neighbors



Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County helps local older adults find a community.

Your continued contributions help keep 1,500 local older adults nourished and active

Our fall mailer recently went out to residents countywide, highlighting the value of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County. The mailer asked for support to continue advancing in our mission of making sure no older adult in our community goes hungry. We are thankful for everyone who has contributed so far, and we look forward to more contributions continuing to roll in to support older adults in Santa Cruz County.

Every contributor's generosity helps us be there for homebound neighbors who do not have the same support system that others might have.

The Meals on Wheels program was created around one central idea: Our homebound neighbors should not be left alone and hungry. Yet, right here in Santa Cruz County, one of every five older adults lives alone — that's more than 14,500 of our neighbors. Many live with illnesses and little income, making everyday tasks like shopping and cooking painful or impossible.

Furthermore, a [recent study](#) from the University of Glasgow found that people experiencing social isolation, such as living alone or feeling lonely, face a higher risk of death. The study points to a simple remedy, though: Friendly, periodic visits, of even just once a month, significantly increase the likelihood of living a longer, more healthful life.

Unfortunately, the need for Meals on Wheels in our county keeps growing. With 40% of all older residents not having enough income to meet their basic needs, more of them are turning to us for help. They need to know that they are not alone and forgotten.

The Meals on Wheels program is not limited to nutritious food alone, as the Meals on Wheels motto of "More than a meal" conveys. The program also addresses social isolation and can identify additional support needs and make referrals to other services for our participants. Several studies have shown that programs addressing nutrition needs and social isolation being experienced by older adults reduce hospitalizations and other healthcare costs, helping people live well, live longer, and remain in their homes.

A gift of just \$30 can ensure five of our neighbors get a healthy meal, along with friendly social interactions and wellness checks from our program's volunteers. More than anything else, a delivery from Meals

News & Notes

SAVE THE DATE!

[Food From the Heart](#), the annual celebration of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County, is returning to the Chaminade Resort on Friday, February 2, 2024 from 11am to 1pm. This festive annual gathering will feature Valentine-themed gifts and prizes in a live and silent auction.

All proceeds benefit Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County's mission of providing healthy meals and friendly human contact for our older adult neighbors. Join us to ensure that no senior goes hungry in our community.

[Sponsorship opportunities](#) are available!

We also welcome donations of [auction items](#).

Contact donations@cbridges.org or call 831-688-8840 ext. 205.

In the Press

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

- [Empowering 22,000 vulnerable residents: Help deliver essential services to older adults, children & families](#)
- [Top 10 ways to volunteer and help fight hunger in Santa Cruz County](#)
- [Poverty highest among seniors, Latinos, and less-educated adults](#)

on Wheels shows our community's neighbors that someone still cares. Please let that someone be you: [Contribute today!](#)

—Darren Daley, Program Director, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County

SUPPORT LOCAL OLDER ADULTS TODAY

Time to 'Share the Love'!

Drivers, start your engines! The Subaru Share the Love Event is back!

Purchase a Subaru between now and January 2 and [Subaru of America, Inc.](#) and its retailers will donate a minimum of \$300 to charity, like [Meals on Wheels America](#), for every new vehicle leased or sold.

Last year, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County received \$4,400 from Subaru of America, Inc., and over the past five years, our Meals on Wheels program has received more than \$30,000 from Subaru's vehicle sales!

Thank you, Subaru, for demonstrating a commitment to supporting healthy meals and caring for neighbors.

MORE INFORMATION



From Our Kitchen



Yaza Shafaj, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County's director of kitchen services

Vegan Chickpea, Butternut Squash, and Kale Stew

This vegan chickpea, butternut squash, and kale stew embraces fall cooking! It is nourishing and warming and makes great leftovers. The kale adds a robust earthiness, and the chickpeas soak up all the flavor, giving you a satisfying bite in every spoonful. Plus, the butternut squash's caramelized sweetness complements the stew's savory richness. This hearty stew is a great go-to dish for a cozy autumn evening.

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes

Total Time: 40 minutes

Servings: 6

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cups diced butternut squash, skin removed and deseeded
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 stalks of celery, diced
- 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 1 bunch kale, stems removed, chopped
- 1 28-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 2 15-ounce cans chickpeas, liquid drained
- 3 to 5 cups water or vegetable broth
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh chopped parsley for garnish

Instructions:

1. In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium heat for 30 seconds. Saute the onions until translucent, then add the butternut squash and cook for 5 minutes.
2. Add the garlic, celery, kale, and dried basil and continue to cook for 3 more minutes over medium heat.
3. Add the diced tomatoes, chickpeas, and 3 to 5 cups of water or vegetable stock, depending on the consistency you prefer. For a thicker stew, add only three cups. For a more soup-like consistency, add five cups.
4. Raise the heat to medium-high and let it come to a boil, then turn down to a simmer for 10 minutes. Once the butternut squash is soft the soup is ready.
5. Season with salt and pepper to your preference. Garnish with fresh parsley.

Notes:

- Grate some Parmesan or pecorino cheese on top.
- To add a little kick, season with red pepper flakes or Calabrian chilies.
- Serve with a loaf of crusty bread or a side of creamy polenta.
- This will freeze well and keep for up to three months.

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

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Community Bridges is an exempt organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; EIN #94-2460211. Donations are tax deductible in excess of the value of any goods or services provided in exchange for your contribution.

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