



Local officials visited Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County participants throughout the week of March 18-22

## Community Champions Raise Awareness

### Thank You to Our Local Community Champions!

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County proudly participated in Community Champions Week on March 18-22.

This nationwide campaign aims to raise awareness of how our program's critical services are addressing isolation, food insecurity, and poverty among older adults.

Community Champions Week recognizes local leaders stepping up to make a difference, and Santa Cruz County's elected officials are no exception. Participating Champions accompanied meal deliveries and assisted at dining sites throughout Santa Cruz County.

Thank you to this year's roster of participating officials, including:

- Yvette Brooks, Vice Mayor, Capitola

- Casey Clark, Watsonville City Council
- Jack Dilles, Scotts Valley City Council
- Zach Friend, Santa Cruz County Supervisor, District 2
- Ramon Gomez, from the office of Felipe Hernandez, Santa Cruz County Supervisor, District 4
- Donna Lind, Scotts Valley City Council
- Manu Koenig, Santa Cruz County Supervisor, District 1

The Community Champions Week initiative, spearheaded by Meals on Wheels America, shines a light on the vital role of nutrition and human connection in the lives of older adults. With the older adult population in Santa Cruz County experiencing remarkable growth, compounded by soaring living costs, the need for support in our community is more urgent than ever.

Community Champions Week serves as a rallying cry for this support, highlighting the indispensable role of programs like Meals on Wheels in safeguarding the health, dignity, and independence of older adults in Santa Cruz County.

**BECOME A CHAMPION: DONATE TODAY!**

## Calling all Coins!: Help Older Adults in Need



*The 17th Annual Coin Drive is a key fundraiser for Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.*

### Annual Partnership with Bay Federal Credit Union Returns

March is an exciting time for Meals on Wheels, with Bay Federal Credit Union hosting our 17th annual Coin Drive. We are grateful to all the credit union staff members who work together to raise funds for our program through the month of March.

### News & Notes

The last few newsletters might have looked a little different than previous ones. Community Bridges and Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County recently changed our donor and email database provider, so there might be some slight differences from newsletters.

Rest assured, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County's monthly newsletter will continue at its normal tempo and Community Bridges' will continue to receive donations without interruption during the transition.

Think you were left off the Meals on Wheels newsletter during the transition? Contact Anna Vaage at [annav@cbridges.org](mailto:annav@cbridges.org).

### In the Press

Click the headlines below to read local and national news about Meals on Wheels for

Bay Federal Credit Union has been a stellar partner to our program over the years. In addition to hosting the annual Coin Drive, Bay Federal employees and their families deliver Thanksgiving meals to our participants, and they plan on returning again this year!

The Coin Drive is a great way to use your spare change to support nutritious meals for local older adults. You can purchase a Meals on Wheels piggy bank at any Bay Federal teller station for a donation of \$10 or more, and save up your coins throughout the year. Bringing your coins to the coin machines at any of Bay Federal's six branches makes it easy.

Over the past 17 years, the Bay Federal Credit Union Coin Drive has raised more than \$75,000! That is enough to purchase food for making 24,000 meals. Your spare change really adds up!

To donate your coins or cash to the Coin Drive, visit any of these Bay Federal branches in March:

- Aptos Branch, 48 Rancho Del Mar, Aptos, CA 95003
- Capitola Branch, 3333 Clares St., Capitola, CA 95010
- Freedom Branch, 2028 Freedom Blvd., Freedom, CA 95019
- Santa Cruz Branch, 420 River St., Santa Cruz, CA 95060
- Scotts Valley Branch, 255 Mount Hermon Road, Scotts Valley, CA 95066
- Watsonville Branch, 1481 Main St., Watsonville, CA 95076

— Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County Team

Santa Cruz County and older adult services.

- [Final federal funding bill for Fiscal Year 2024 cuts \\$8 million from senior nutrition programs](#)
- [Community Bridges puts senior center purchase offer on table](#)
- [Suicide Rates Are High And Rising Among Older Adults In The US](#)
- [1 in 5 older adults don't have someone they can depend on in time of need. It's driving up ER visits and food insecurity](#)

## Age Well Survey Closes March 31!

The Santa Cruz Human Services Department, in partnership with the Seniors Council and local cities, is developing a Master Plan for Aging, which will be a blueprint for implementing strategies and partnerships that promote healthy aging for all.

This effort is called Age Well Santa Cruz County. Age Well Santa Cruz County is developing a Master Plan for Aging, a 10-year blueprint to ensure people of all ages and abilities in Santa Cruz County are afforded equitable opportunities to thrive as they age, how and where they choose.

To learn more about Age Well Santa Cruz County visit:

[AgeWellSantaCruzCounty.org](https://AgeWellSantaCruzCounty.org).

The Age Well Santa Cruz County survey is collecting community feedback focused on aging locally. If you are a resident of Santa Cruz County and 40 years or older we encourage you to take the survey before it closes on March 31:

[tinyurl.com/AgeWellSantaCruz](https://tinyurl.com/AgeWellSantaCruz)



Are you 40 years or older? Age Well Santa Cruz County wants to hear from you



## Recognizing Food from the Heart Award Honorees



### A Last Call for an Unforgettable Afternoon

One of the best parts of our signature fundraising event, the Food from the Heart luncheon, is the opportunity to recognize some of the amazing people who support Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

Learn more about the award honorees from this year's Food from the Heart:

### Sweetheart Awards: Gary Lenker and Katie Nuñez



**Gary Lenker** has volunteered at Meals on Wheels' Live Oak kitchen and dining site for more than five years, generously donating up to 15 hours per week to support the program. A retired carpenter from Pennsylvania, Gary drove Meals on Wheels delivery routes for 10 years before joining the team in Santa Cruz. He arrives at the kitchen at 6:30 a.m. daily to package up to 600 meals for each day's routes. He also fulfills administrative duties, providing invaluable support to help the program meet the community's growing needs.



As the Older Adult Services Supervisor for City of Watsonville Parks & Community Services Department, **Katie Nuñez** works closely with the Meals on Wheels team to welcome more than 200 participants each year to enjoy weekday meals and build community at the Watsonville Senior Center, where 46% of participants live alone, 44% live in poverty, and 59% are Spanish speakers. Katie’s skillful coordination of senior center activities and facilities makes her feel like a member of the Meals on Wheels family.




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## Community Champions: Manu Koenig and Bruce McPherson



**First District Supervisor Manu Koenig** provides thoughtful leadership to the Meals on Wheels program, headquartered at the Elena Baskin Live Oak Senior Center and Annex. Supervisor Koenig’s strong advocacy helped pave the way for First District community leaders to continue to work collaboratively to meet the needs of children, families and older adults, and the agencies and services that support them.

**Fifth District County Supervisor Bruce McPherson** provides leadership and advocacy for the San Lorenzo Valley area, where Meals on Wheels drives deep into the Santa Cruz Mountains to bring home-delivered meal staples to more than 100 residents annually, as well as nurturing the tight-knit community that gathers for weekday meals at Highlands Park Senior and Community Center in Ben Lomond. Supervisor McPherson has been a great friend to participants, advocating for and supporting services to meet their needs through 12 years in office and beyond.




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

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