



Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County delivers meals to more than 1,300 local older adults each year.

Honoring our Sweetheart Award winners

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County relies on donations, volunteers, local funding, and community advocacy to help meet the needs of older adults in our community. With the reductions in local funding this year, it is more critical than ever. At the annual Food from the Heart luncheon, we have an opportunity to make a difference and honor community members whose contributions make this vital program possible. The Sweetheart Awards recognize community members who dedicate their time to supporting Meals on Wheels and the local people we serve.

Anissa Novak and Joe Hyatt

Sweethearts Anissa Novak and Joe Hyatt started volunteering with Meals on Wheels in 2010, driving a weekly delivery route in their area. Anissa joined Friends of Meals on Wheels the following year, providing leadership and event planning to help raise funds for the program. The husband and wife team have cultivated significant personal support among their networks for the annual Food from the Heart fundraiser event.

In 2024, Anissa co-chaired the Food from the Heart planning committee, recruiting new members, sponsors and attendees to help raise a record-setting \$70,300. Joe and Anissa's photo also appears on Meals on Wheels' volunteer outreach brochure, encouraging others to get



involved and help ensure that no elderly person goes hungry.



Terry Teitelbaum

Sweetheart Terry Teitelbaum is a founding member of Friends of Meals on Wheels, formed in 2011 to provide leadership and fundraising support for the program. Working as a consultant to the program since 1999, Terry designed and manages a custom database to track client and service data to ensure optimal efficiency for the program's operations. She also designed a "point of sale" check-in system for dining sites, making it easier to save costs.

"Terry has been an invaluable resource for me during my first year with the program," said Dana Wagner, Program Director for Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County. "She ensured a smooth transition, and she provides valuable data that supports our mission and funding for the program."

"It's such a straightforward program: feeding people. The mission is so clear and vital, and everyone I've encountered embraces it with passion and dedication," Terry said. "The staff is so incredibly efficient, the systems work really well, and the capacity to nourish so many people is profound."

"Meals on Wheels is more than food," Terry added. "During Covid and the CZU fires, staff made sure participants were safe and had access to resources. They take care of our elders — our parents, grandparents, neighbors, friends — and help them remain independent, living connected, vital lives."

We extend our deep thanks to Terry Teitelbaum, Anissa Novak, Joe Hyatt, and everyone else who helps Meals on Wheels continue to provide services in our community.

You can help us recognize our Sweetheart Award winners and support Meals on Wheels by attending the Food From the Heart Luncheon & Valentine's Day Extravaganza on Friday, February 14, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the beautiful Chaminade Resort & Spa in Santa Cruz. [Purchase your tickets today!](#)

Together, we can ensure every older adult in our community feels nourished, valued, and cared for. Join us at [Food From the Heart](#) and help us deliver more than meals — help us deliver hope.

Join Us at Food From the Heart

Director's note: Older adults in South County need your help

News & Notes

We're excited to announce the launch of our **new online volunteer application**—making it easier and faster than ever to join our mission! This streamlined process will help us bring on volunteers more quickly,



Ramon Gomez, Chief of Staff to Santa Cruz County Supervisor Felipe Hernandez, made deliveries to Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County participants during last year's Community Champions week. The need for volunteer drivers in South Santa Cruz County is growing as our county continues to age.

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County served 1,737 people in 2024 — an increase of 429 from the previous year — and delivered 155,702 meals to homes. About 25% of older adults receiving our home-delivered meals are in South County, and we need more volunteers to help provide the best possible service to this population.

In Watsonville, 327 older adults — more than any other city in the county — rely on Meals on Wheels for home-delivered meals, receiving more than 39,000 meals. Another 200 older adults enjoy daily meals from Meals on Wheels and connections at the Watsonville Senior Center, and 59 residents in unincorporated South County depend on home-delivered meals from us.

The people we serve in this area often face multiple challenges. Of the people we serve in Watsonville, 81% live in poverty and 68% are disabled. Health outcomes are also worse for older adults in South County than in other parts of Santa Cruz County.

[Preliminary results](#) from the Age Well Santa Cruz County survey of more than 3,200 residents show that many respondents age 60 and older describe themselves as being in good health, but health disparities exist. Respondents reporting significantly lower health ratings than their counterparts include those who:

- have a disability,
- have lower income,
- live alone,
- are without stable housing, or
- ***reside in Watsonville.***

Watsonville respondents age 60 and older rated their community less positively than residents of Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Capitola on all dimensions except services for older adults. Meals on Wheels is a crucial part of this network of services for older adults in Watsonville and across the county.

If you are interested in contributing to the health and happiness of older adults, we encourage you to [sign up today to become a volunteer](#) and deliver meals with Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz

allowing us to expand our support for seniors in need across Santa Cruz County.

If you've been thinking about making a difference in your community, now is the perfect time to get involved. Visit

communitybridges.org/volunteer to apply today and start changing lives!

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.

- [Meals on Wheels Taps Dana Wagner](#)
- [Santa Cruz County declares itself sanctuary community for immigrants](#)
- [Meals on Wheels faces first waitlist in 50 years: Support Santa Cruz seniors at Valentine's Day fundraiser](#)
- [White House says Trump funding freeze remains in effect despite rescinding OMB memo](#)

County. We offer flexible driving schedules that meet your needs and empower you to provide support when you can.

Meals on Wheels doesn't just provide meals; it provides independence, dignity, and connection:

- 92% of participants say it helps them live independently.
- 87% of participants feel safer at home, with 79% reporting eating healthier foods.

Your time and support can help older adults stay independent with dignity in their homes, providing the care and compassion we all wish for our loved ones and ourselves as we age.

—Dana Wagner, Senior Program Director, Meals on Wheels

Save on Energy Bills with CARE and FERA Programs

This month, we're diving deeper into two important PG&E programs that could make a big difference in your monthly energy costs. The **California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE)** and **Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA)** programs are designed to help households save money while staying comfortable and safe. Let's break down how these programs work, who qualifies, and how you can get help applying.



What is the CARE Program?

The CARE program offers a **20% or more discount** on your monthly gas and electricity bills.

Who qualifies for CARE?

You may qualify if:

- Your household meets **income guidelines** based on the number of people living in your home.
- You're enrolled in one or more of the following public assistance programs:
 - **CalFresh (Food Stamps)**
 - **WIC (Women, Infants, and Children Program)**
 - **Medi-Cal or Medicaid**
 - **SSI (Supplemental Security Income)**
 - **LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program)**

Why CARE is great for seniors:

Many older adults qualify for CARE because of their participation in these assistance programs. The discount can significantly reduce monthly expenses, helping you keep more of your hard-earned income for other essentials.

Learn more and apply here: pge.com/care

What is the FERA Program?

The FERA program provides an **18% discount on electricity bills** for **households of 3 or more people**.

Who qualifies for FERA?

- Your household size is at least 3 people.
- Your household income exceeds the CARE program's limits but still falls within the FERA guidelines.

Why FERA is great for families:

FERA helps larger households who may not qualify for CARE still receive a meaningful discount on their electricity bills. Whether you live with extended family or a small household, it's worth seeing if you're eligible.

Learn more and apply here: pge.com/fera

Tips to keep your heart healthy



February is heart health month. Here are some tips to help keep your heart healthy:

- Reduce saturated fat intake
- Limit salt intake
- Eat dark chocolate, nuts, and fish
- Drink black or green tea
- Include fiber from whole grains and whole fruit
- Make time for breakfast

Eggs definitely aren't just for breakfast. Enjoy this heart-healthy meal, full of color, good nutrition, and deliciousness, for a fast lunch or weeknight dinner.

Poblano Frittata

Ingredients:

- 4 large eggs
- 1/4 cup fat-free milk
- 2 tablespoons chopped, fresh cilantro
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 2 medium poblano peppers (seeds and ribs discarded, chopped)
- 2 cups frozen, whole kernel corn (thawed)
- 2 medium green onion (chopped)
- 1/4 cup finely shredded cotija cheese or 1/4 cup crumbled queso fresco cheese
- 1 medium tomato (chopped)
- 1/4 cup fat-free sour cream

Instructions:

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, and cilantro.
2. In a medium skillet, heat the oil over medium heat, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook the poblano for 3 minutes, or until it begins to brown on the edges, stirring frequently.
3. Stir in the corn and green onion. Reduce the heat to medium low and carefully pour the egg mixture over all.
4. Cook, covered, for 10 minutes, or until the mixture is just set on the edge and is still a bit soft in the center.
5. Remove from the heat. Sprinkle with the cheese. Cut into eight wedges. Place two wedges on each plate. Top with tomatoes and sour cream.

—Caren Dix, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

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

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