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36 Years of Compassionate Welcomes

For the past 36 years, Julio Espinoza has been the first point of contact for new participants of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County. His warmth, kindness, and understanding brings a smile to everyone who interacts with him.

Julio started working for Meals on Wheels in August 1989. He knew from the first day that it was the right place for him.

“As the years have passed, I have come to appreciate most of all from my work the many genuinely kindhearted people I have worked with,” Julio says. “They have added to my sense of fulfillment that I chose the right career path to help feed a vulnerable and grateful population.”

Every day, hundreds of older adults rely on Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County to stay nourished and connected. Our staff and volunteers ensure that vulnerable, homebound people are safe and have the resources they need. Without Julio’s behind-the-scenes work, none of this would happen.

As a staff program assistant, Julio responds to older adults who are interested in the program and referrals from family and community partners. He explains the process of applying for home-delivered meals and works closely with new participants to guide them through getting set up with the program, including coordinating their initial assessment. Based on the new participants’ address, Julio adds the participant to a route to receive a regular cadence of meal deliveries.

He also fields daily calls, questions, and feedback from participants and their families, and he coordinates meal delivery with the Meals on Wheels dispatch team. Julio works closely with volunteers to ensure meal delivery proceeds smoothly for both drivers and participants.

Reflecting on his time with Meals on Wheels, Julio describes it as a long road with many winding turns.

“I know the wheels will keep on turning down that road in the hands of earnest leadership that will bridge the gaps to come,” he says. “I will always consider it a privilege, and a boost to my self-esteem, to be a trusted and respected employee of Meals on Wheels and Community Bridges.”

Director's note: How our generous community is stepping up to support meals and connections



At the crack of dawn each weekday, our dedicated Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County chefs fire up the kitchen to prepare hundreds of fresh, nutritious meals—ensuring older adults across Santa Cruz County start their day nourished and cared for.

Our spring mailer recently landed in mailboxes of residents countywide. This campaign puts a spotlight on the importance of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County, and it asks for community support so our program can thrive as we can make sure no older adult in our community goes hungry.

The vital importance of Meals on Wheels is clearly resonating, with an even bigger response than last year. The impact of the spring mailer campaign so far includes \$71,200 donated, 700 donations, and 113 new donors.

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our program so we can serve older adults in our

News & Notes

We're looking for volunteer drivers in Watsonville and the San Lorenzo Valley to help deliver meals and support local seniors.

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.

- [Guest Commentary | Federal budget bill not what people want – or our community needs](#)
- [Exclusive: Senate Dems blare alarm for Meals on Wheels funding](#)
- [Majority of Older Adults in Poverty in 2021 Lived Alone](#)
- [A community remembers Mike Rotkin](#)

community.

If you haven't yet had a chance to make a contribution, please consider supporting the health and wellness of our local older adults. Your support is vital as we navigate the impacts of federal funding changes, which will only increase the need among the older adults we serve. With 6.6 million older adults' households receiving SNAP food benefits, and more than half of Medicaid benefits going to older adults and people with disabilities, any cuts to Medicaid and SNAP will undoubtedly harm the most vulnerable people who rely on these services for survival.

A gift of just \$50 to Meals on Wheels 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 on Wheels shows our community that we care.

You can [contribute today](#) to Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County!

—Dana Wagner, Senior Program Director, Meals on Wheels

Expanded PG&E Bill Assistance Now Available for Smaller Households

Our partners at PG&E recently updated their income eligibility guidelines for several financial assistance programs, effective June 1—and for the first time, smaller households are included in expanded savings.



The **[Family Electric Rate Assistance \(FERA\)](#)** program, which previously supported only households with three or more people, is now open to **one- and two-person households**. This change means that more older adults, individuals living alone, and couples may now qualify for monthly discounts on their electric bills.

Other available programs include:

- **[California Alternate Rates for Energy \(CARE\)](#)**: Offers a monthly **20% or greater discount** on gas and electricity bills. CARE has lower income eligibility thresholds than FERA, making it ideal for households with more limited incomes.
- **[Energy Savings Assistance \(ESA\) Program](#)**: Provides **free energy-saving home improvements**, such as insulation, energy-efficient appliances, and lighting upgrades, to help lower monthly energy use and reduce bills over time.

If you or someone you know could benefit from these programs, visit PG&E's [Financial Assistance and Support page](#) to review updated guidelines and apply. These changes could provide much-needed relief—especially for Meals on Wheels participants managing rising living costs.

Avocado Pita Pockets Recipe



This creative snack helps keep the midday munchies away, and it is quick to prepare.

Ingredients

- 1 ripe, fresh avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and diced
- 2 whole grain pita bread pockets, cut in half
- 1/4 cup canned chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 2 tablespoons crumbled Cotija or Feta cheese
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions

- Wash hands with soap and water.
- Fill pita pocket half with avocado, chickpeas and cheese, dividing evenly.
- Heat in microwave for 15 to 20 seconds if desired. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Source: Created by Fresh Avocados Love One Today, a member of the MyPlate National Strategic Partnership Program

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

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