



Honoring connections and impact

We look forward to celebrating 50 years of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County during our 2026 [Food from the Heart Luncheon](#). We invite you to join us for the Valentine's Day-themed event on February 13 at Chaminade Resort & Spa.

This annual celebration of community and purpose offers delicious local cuisine, inspiring stories, a silent auction, and special moments that highlight the power of giving back. All proceeds support delivering nutritious meals, safety checks, and meaningful connections to older adults in our community.

Each year at the Food from the Heart Luncheon, we also honor community members whose generosity and leadership make our program possible. We rely on donations, volunteers, local funding, and advocacy to provide more than half of the meals we deliver.



Joyce Spencer



Bob Conroy

The Sweetheart Award — Honoring Those Who Lead with Heart

The Sweetheart Award honors individuals who dedicate their time and hearts to caring for local older adults by providing nutritious meals and meaningful human connections.

This year, as part of the 10th Annual Sweetheart Award Ceremony and Meals on Wheels' 50th anniversary celebration, we are honored to recognize **Joyce Spencer** and **Bob Conroy** for their decades of service volunteering for Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

Joyce has volunteered for more than 20 years at Highlands Park Senior Center, a vital gathering place where seniors find nourishment, companionship, and access to essential services. For many, it is an oasis of connection.

Through Joyce's dedication — and that of volunteers like her — Meals on Wheels serves approximately 50 residents and more than 5,000 meals each year at this site. Over two decades, Joyce has helped serve an estimated 50,000 meals, building relationships and community along the way.

Now 94 years old, Joyce reflects on the importance of Meals on Wheels in her own life as well as the lives she has touched.

"It gives me a reason to get up every morning," she said. "It's more than just a meal. It's the chance to visit with friends. It gives you a sense of giving to the world something that only you can do."

Upon retiring, Bob volunteered near his home in Santa Clara. But he also wanted to contribute to the community he considers his second home in Capitola.

Every Friday, he'd drive over the hill, where he met up with friends whom he also recruited to deliver Meals on Wheels. The three friends conducted their delivery routes before meeting up to enjoy Friday lunch and camaraderie of their own.

Through his 25 years of service, Bob considers the staff at Meals on Wheels as his close personal friends, and the participants with whom he's grown close as family.

"I'm not embarrassed to say that I love them as family members," Bob says about the people he's grown close with along his route. "Food is so important to people. And the time we can spend together means so much to both of us. I look forward to seeing them."



Celebrating Bay Federal Credit Union, a Community Champions Award Honoree

Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County is proud to present the 2026 Community Champions Award to **Bay Federal Credit Union**, recognizing more than 20 years of extraordinary community partnership and support.



Over the past two decades, Bay Federal Credit Union has raised more than \$95,000 through its annual Coin Drive — helping provide nearly 10,000 meals to local older adults. Bay Federal team members and their families have also volunteered countless hours delivering Thanksgiving meals, demonstrating hands-on commitment to ensuring no older adult goes hungry.

Launched in 2015, the Community Champions Award honors partners whose advocacy, leadership, and influence help secure the resources necessary to meet community needs. Bay Federal Credit Union exemplifies this spirit through sustained generosity, volunteerism, and community leadership.

Another Way to Support Food From the Heart: Local Fundraisers

Woodstock's Pizza Nights

710 Front St, Santa Cruz

Thursdays: February 5, 12, 19 & 26 | 11:00 AM–Midnight

Enjoy a meal while giving back. Woodstock's Pizza will donate **20% of sales** when you mention **Meals on Wheels** in person or use the code **MOW2026** when ordering online.



Pacific Cookie Company Day

1203 Pacific Ave, Santa Cruz

Friday, February 6 | 10:00 AM–Midnight

Stop by anytime throughout the day. A portion of all sales will be donated to Meals on Wheels, and Pacific Cookie Company will generously match the donation.



SUPPORT LOCAL SENIORS TODAY

Director's Note: Cultivating community



As I think about what it means to celebrate 50 years of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County, I'm filled with gratitude.

This program is a reflection of our community's strong spirit of generosity. A small but mighty team of 14 staff members and 75 dedicated volunteers delivers nearly 200,000 nutritious meals annually to homebound older adults and community dining sites throughout the county. Our promise to never miss a meal reflects a deep commitment to the dignity, safety, and well-being of the people we serve.

Over the past 50 years, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County has delivered nearly 10 million meals, but it is so much more than that. The true impact is felt in the daily routines that make each delivery possible: meals prepared and packed, routes coordinated, volunteers dispatched, and older adults greeted with reliable nourishment and meaningful human connection.

At dining sites, older adults gather for warm meals, familiar faces, and a sense of belonging.

Along mountain roads, coastal communities, and rural routes, volunteer drivers deliver meals to homebound neighbors — often providing vital safety checks and reassurance through friendly conversation. These consistent moments build trust, stability, and care.

News and Notes

We're looking for volunteer drivers in 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.

[CLICK HERE](#) to apply today and start changing lives!

In the Press

Click the headlines below to read local and national news affecting county residents.

[Guest Commentary | A Funding Freeze Would Put Seniors at Risk—Congress Must Act](#)

[Fifty years at the doorstep: Why Meals on Wheels matters more than ever—and how you can help](#)

[Meals on Wheels to celebrate 50th anniversary](#)

Going into 2026, we can all resolve to deepen our community involvement.

One simple but impactful way of getting involved is to support Food from the Heart with these fundraisers:

Every Thursday in February from 12-9 p.m. at Woodstock's Pizza Santa Cruz, customers can mention the Meals on Wheels fundraiser or **use code MOW2026 when ordering online.**

Pacific Cookie Company will be donating a portion of its proceeds on February 6 to support Meals on Wheels.

My deep thanks to Woodstock's and Pacific Cookie Company for their support. Thank you for being a vital part of our community.

I look forward to celebrating 50 years of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County with all of you and strengthening our program for many more years to come.

—Dana Wagner, Director, Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County



Braised chicken thighs with spinach

In this recipe, chicken thighs are cooked until golden brown, then simmered in a rich onion, garlic, thyme, and rosemary sauce with tender spinach.

Ingredients

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 small yellow onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 cup water
- 1 package 10-ounce frozen spinach (or 1 bunch fresh spinach)

Directions

1. Heat skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 teaspoon oil. Add chicken, top side down. Cook on each side until deeply browned. Remove the chicken to a plate and set aside.
2. Reheat skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, thyme, and rosemary. Cook about 5 minutes until the onion is soft and golden. Return the chicken to the pan.

3. Add the water and cover. Continue cooking for about 30 minutes.
4. Add frozen spinach and cook for about 10 minutes. Or, add the fresh spinach and cook about 2 minutes, until it wilts. Serve right away.

Source: USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

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

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