



Honoring connections and impact

The generosity of the Santa Cruz community continues to shine. We just held our most successful [Food from the Heart Luncheon](#), raising a record \$116,000. This milestone was accompanied by several others, including our celebration of 50 years of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County and our announcement of delivery of the program's 10 millionth meal.

The Food from the Heart Luncheon was a proud moment of reaffirming our commitment to older adults in our community at a critical time, following our first-ever waitlist last year due to rising costs and reduced public funding.

We opened the luncheon with acknowledging the broader national climate and the importance of coming together in community. Food from the Heart is how we honor the past, respond to the present, and ensure that Meals on Wheels continues showing up for the next generation of older adults.

Awards and honorees

The luncheon was also an opportunity to recognize some of the individuals who dedicate their time and hearts to caring for local older adults by providing nutritious meals and meaningful human connection.

The Sweetheart Awards were presented by Carol Childers and Whitney Rose to:

Joyce Spencer, who has volunteered for more than 20 years and helped serve more than 50,000 meals at Highlands Park Senior Center in Ben Lomond.

Bob Conroy, who has volunteered for 25 years as a driver, built deep relationships with people on his delivery route, and recruited friends to serve alongside him.

We presented the 2026 Community Champions Award to Bay Federal Credit Union, recognizing more than 20 years of extraordinary community partnership and support.

These awardees represent the heart of our program — consistency, compassion, and dedication.



Carol Childers (left) and Joyce Spencer



Whitney Rose (left) and Bob Conroy



Public leadership support

Congressman Jimmy Panetta presented a formal proclamation in honor of 50 years of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County. Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors representatives including Felipe Hernandez, Regina Kelbert for Supervisor Kim De Serpa, and Trina K. Barton for Supervisor Justin Cummings issued a proclamation as well.

Former supervisor Bruce McPherson, who has dedicated more than 50 years of his life to public service, gave a moving speech drawing parallels between public trust and showing up consistently for our

community. Watsonville City Councilmember Jimmy Dutra and Scotts Valley Mayor Donna Lind were in attendance, too.

The keynote speech came from Leon Panetta. In addition to being a former U.S. Secretary of Defense, CIA Director, White House Chief of Staff, and Congressman, Panetta authored the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 and is a longstanding advocate for Meals on Wheels and Community Bridges.

Panetta noted we need to continue to fight to support older adults. It is not enough to hope and pray, he said.

We are grateful for the powerful presence and words of support from so many local, state, and national leaders.

Thank you to our sponsors

We extend our deep thanks to all of the sponsors whose generosity helped make the luncheon possible:

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Woodstock's Pizza

Thanks also to the community partners who joined the luncheon celebration: Aegis, Beacon Independent Living Services, Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, Driscoll's, Grey Bears, Highlands Park Senior & Community Center, Lifespan, and Seniors Council (AAA).

The Food from the Heart Luncheon was an important reminder of how strongly people in our community are rallied around a shared promise: ensuring no older adult goes hungry.

Director's Note: Discover the power of nutrition

News and Notes

We're looking for volunteer drivers 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.

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

[Get the Facts on SNAP and Senior Hunger](#)

[What Medicaid, SNAP work requirements in Trump's 'big beautiful bill' mean for older workers](#)

National Nutrition Month, established by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and held annually in March, invites communities to reflect on how food influences health, independence, and long-term well-being. This year's theme, "Discover the Power of Nutrition," directly aligns with the work and mission of Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

We know that nutrition powers health, supports independence, and reduces isolation. We see it daily in our work and the way our staff and volunteers touch the lives of the people we serve.

The latest survey results from participants clearly speak to the power of nutrition:

- **96% of congregate dining and 82% of home-delivered meal participants** agree the meals help them eat healthier.
- **More than 96% of all participants** are satisfied or very satisfied with the service, showing the quality and consistency of the meals.
- **More than 86% of all participants** say Meals on Wheels is their main or a significant source of nutrition.

Home-delivered meals are directly linked to aging independently and safely at home: 100% of home-delivered meal recipients say Meals on Wheels helps them stay in their home.

Whether people gather at our dining sites or have meals delivered to their homes, Meals on Wheels is also a vital source of connection for all participants: 91% of congregate participants say dining helps them feel less isolated. Many home-delivered meal participants commented on the joy of in-person contact with the delivery drivers.

Nutrition nourishes the body. Human connection nourishes the spirit. We deliver both.

We all have a shared responsibility and commitment to ensure older adults thrive in our community. If our record-setting Food

from the Heart Luncheon this month was any indicator, that commitment is stronger than ever.

We encourage you to embrace this commitment and discover the power of nutrition by volunteering for Meals on Wheels.

[Learn more](#) about how simple it is to help.

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



Snack on these healthy and tasty treats

Diabetes-friendly snacks are essential to keep blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible and to help prevent low blood sugar. When it comes to snacking, women usually need snacks with 15 to 30 grams of carbohydrate and men usually need 30 to 45 grams of carbohydrate. Combining foods that contain protein, fiber and healthy fats with carbohydrates help to balance blood glucose levels.

Here are some healthy ideas for snacks that are low in carbs and will give you the energy you need to get through your day.

- **Mozzarella string cheese:** This protein-rich snack is great on its own or paired with fresh vegetables or whole wheat crackers. Carbs: less than 1 gram
- **Popcorn:** An alternative to chips or crackers, this whole grain snack is full of fiber and can be eaten with butter, sprinkled with grated parmesan cheese, or sweetened with a light drizzle of sugar-free chocolate syrup. Carbs: 16 grams per 4 cups
- **Cottage cheese or Greek yogurt and berries:** Cottage cheese and Greek yogurt is high in protein. When paired with berries, you get the bonus of beneficial antioxidants. Carbs: 15 grams in 1/2 cup cottage cheese and 1/2 cup berries

- **Whole wheat crackers and natural peanut butter:** This powerful snack provides protein, fiber and unsaturated fats – a perfect combination. Carbs: 15 grams in 3 Triscuits with 2 tablespoons natural peanut butter
- **Hard-boiled eggs:** Eggs are a complete protein, which is highly absorbable and has all the amino acids our bodies need. Carbs: less than 1 gram (and more than 6 grams of protein)
- **Edamame:** Rich in healthy fiber, soy protein, antioxidants and vitamin K, this snack also helps prevent the risk of heart disease. Carbs: 15 grams per cup (and 8 grams of fiber)
- **Pear with a handful of almonds:** Pears are rich in essential antioxidants and fiber. Almonds contain healthy fats, fiber, protein, magnesium and vitamin E. Carbs:16 grams in small Asian pear and 12 almonds
- **Hummus and veggies:** Hummus is delicious, versatile, and packed with nutrients. Choose your favorite seasonal vegetables and get dipping! Carbs: 15 grams in 3 tablespoons of hummus with 4 baby carrots and 4 small celery sticks

Source: USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

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