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Posted on May 31, 2011 at 7:00am

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Meals on Wheels has a special place in my heart, probably because it fed my grandfather many years ago. He was never much of a cook, and as he aged, he became less and less interested in eating — but he ate like a king when Meals on Wheels came around.

As I [started to explore my new community](#) this spring, I thought of my grandpa and Googled Meals on Wheels. The kitchen that prepares all the food for Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County, I discovered, is at the [Live Oak Family Resource Center](#) at 17th Avenue and Capitola Road, just a bike ride away from where I live.

So this week, I tagged along with two volunteers as they filled up coolers and bags with food for a week and made their deliveries to seniors in Capitola and Live Oak.

The volunteer with the security uniform is Spencer Lawrence-Emanuel, an all-of-20-year-old Capitola Mall guard. He's there with Donna Spain, the mall's office manager. Every week, two people from the mall's management and security staffs show up to deliver the route.

[Macerich Co.](#), which owns the mall, gives its employees two paid hours a month to volunteer, and it was Donna who set up the generous partnership with [Meals on Wheels](#) more than a year ago.

Now when she and Spencer knock on doors, food in hand, it's as if they're visiting their own grandparents. Some of the people, like Mike, who lives in a camper in the Trailer Haven off Portola Road, wait for them at the door every week. Donna and Spencer greet him warmly and unload the frozen meals into his freezer and the milk and fruit into his fridge.

"He is the sweetest man," Donna says, as they head to the trailer next door. There, she's used to going right in the unlocked door, because the woman has trouble getting off her couch. This time, though, the door is locked, and Mike comes out to say his neighbor was whisked away in an ambulance last week. That's bound to happen on this route, I guess.

Eight more seniors are on the delivery list, almost all in different mobile home parks, and Donna and Spencer have just an hour to do their deliveries, so there's not much chit-chat. The route is efficient, and so are the volunteers.

But you can tell they enjoy what they're doing, and the homebound seniors love it, too.

"The people are incredibly gracious," Donna says. "I don't think there's one stop where they don't thank us profusely."

I could see myself doing this volunteer work, but I'd probably want to spend half a day with each senior, defrosting the spaghetti and meatballs, peeling the oranges. On the route with Donna and Spencer, I started to ask a man named Chuck in the East Cliff Village Apartments about his terrier, but by the time I learned the dog's name was Benji, it was time to go to the next place.

I emailed Naomi Brauner, director of communications for [Community Bridges](#), which runs Meals on Wheels, if there's a need for more volunteers, and she responded with an enthusiastic yes! She promises to get back to me next week to tell me more about the program.

Meanwhile, I have a lot more good causes to check out in my new hometown. Do you have any suggestions? Leave me a comment!

Comments (1)



Carol A. Cassara

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11:52am on Tuesday, May 31, 2011

This is such a great organization-how are they funded? And kudos to Macerich for giving employees time off to volunteer. A Silicon Valley company I worked for back in the mid 90s gave every employee 40 hours a year off to volunteer. Such a wonderful thing to do.

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