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Longtime volunteers power Meals on Wheels

by Joe Shreve

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From left to right, Ernie Avelar, his wife Lou and Bill Kaufman load Meals-on-Wheels coolers into a car in Scotts Valley. Lucjan Szweczyk/Press-Banner

For many elderly and disabled people, getting out of the house and around town can be a difficult proposition. Sometimes, even visiting the grocery store is out of the question.

Enter Meals on Wheels and a team of dedicated volunteers, such as Ernie Avelar, 80, who regularly donates his time alongside his wife, Lou, to make sure that folks who have trouble getting around are still able to enjoy hot, nutritious meals.

The Avelars have volunteered for Meals on Wheels for well over a decade — about 12 to 14 years, Ernie guesses — spending their Wednesdays in the car delivering a week's worth of food to the homes of people in Felton and Scotts Valley.

Ernie Avelar began working for Meals on Wheels with a friend as part of his community service through his affiliation with the Santa Cruz Moose Lodge.

He said he delivers food to about nine houses a week.

"It's just a nice deal," Avelar said. "We get to meet a lot of nice people — it's a lot of fun."

Lisa Berkowitz, the program director for Meals on Wheels in Santa Cruz County, described the Avelars as "everything you could want in a volunteer."

"They're very reliable and dependable," she said. "It's a special job."

Berkowitz said the best thing about having long-term volunteers is that it becomes clear who can be counted on.

"Who we have (volunteering for Meals on Wheels) is very important to us," she said. "We need to feel confident into who we're sending into people's homes."

Berkowitz also praised the efforts of a dedicated group of Seagate employees who, since 1997, have used their lunch breaks to deliver meals.

"Over the years, they've managed to serve thousands of meals," she said. "It's a great way to help out in a community."

AT A GLANCE

To volunteer to deliver meals, or to get help from Meals on Wheels, local residents can visit www.communitybridges.org/meals.htm or call 464-3180.

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