



# Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels

*Delivering independence one meal at a time*

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels celebrates 50 years and 2 million meals delivered**

**Santa Barbara, CA (January 18, 2022)** – Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels recently delivered its 2 millionth meal as it celebrates 50 years of delivering hot, affordable meals to seniors and homebound community members.

“We’ve never missed a day since 1971, when we had just 18 clients and two drivers,” said Dan Kronstadt, Co-President of the nonprofit’s Board of Directors. “Today, over 150 clients receive meals freshly prepared by Valle Verde retirement community. We have about 80 volunteers who make deliveries seven days a week – including every holiday – to people of all ages who are unable to shop and cook for themselves, yet want to remain independent.”

José Ornelas, who has been a client since 2010, received meal number 2 million. One of the volunteer drivers who regularly sees him donated a month of free meals to commemorate the milestone.

In 2021, 288 clients received meals – some for short periods of time following an illness or hospital stay, and others on a long-term basis. There are no age requirements to receive meals. Meals on Wheels’ youngest client is 24, and there are five who are over the age of 100.

The Santa Barbara organization is one of 5,000 Meals on Wheels programs around the country. Back in 1971, two local women, Madeline Blickley and Lilla Burgess, saw a need and started a six-month pilot program through the Community Action Commission. Meals were prepared by the Sweden House restaurant, and the local American Red Cross arranged for volunteer drivers. The program’s future was uncertain, until a cashier’s check for \$10,000 arrived in the mail from an anonymous donor.

Leanna Miller, who retired as Program Administrator from Meals on Wheels last year, joined the organization in 1976, when her “office” was a small corner off the Yellow Cab facility owned by a Board member’s husband. In later years, Cottage Hospital and County General Hospital provided food, and Valle Verde took over the cooking 30 years ago.

Today, hot, nutritious meals and regular visits from caring volunteers help clients remain healthy, independent and exactly where they want to be – in their homes.

**Serving Santa Barbara since 1971**

Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation – Tax ID #51-0139577



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While everyone anticipates the arrival of a meal at mid-day, many clients also look forward to the friendly faces of drivers – or at least the smiling eyes above a mask. When circumstances are safe, a short visit means a lot to clients who don't often have visitors. "Through the years, drivers have intervened countless times when they saw that clients were deeply lonely, or needed medical attention, mental health support or adult protective services," said Kay Castagnola, Volunteer Driver Coordinator. "Our volunteers become the eyes and ears for family members who live out of the area."

With the arrival of COVID-19, Meals on Wheels refined its procedures to meet new health and safety guidelines and temporarily lost many drivers when the virus surged. "But the volunteers who stayed really stepped up, even recruiting new drivers, and we never missed a day," Castagnola said.

Each meal, which includes a main course, two side dishes, soup, salad or fresh fruit, dessert and milk, costs no more than \$4.75, and if a client has special circumstances, that's taken into consideration. There are vegetarian menus, and special meals available for clients who have diabetes or specific dietary requirements, or require chopped or pureed food. A registered dietitian works closely with the staff at Valle Verde to make sure the food meets strict standards for preparation and quality. Delivery plans are flexible – some clients receive a meal only a few days a week while others have daily deliveries.

Thanks to local support and volunteer drivers, Meals on Wheels keeps the price of a delivered meal affordable – about 25 percent less than the actual food cost and 50 percent less than the total cost associated with a prepared meal.

"We receive no federal funding, and instead rely on grants and donations from individuals, foundations and Santa Barbara County," said Board Co-President Scott Reid. "With only two part-time employees, we lean heavily on our volunteers. Some came to us through organizations like the Rotary Club and Alpha Resource Center, but most are individuals who make deliveries on their own or with a spouse or family member. In fact, we have five families who have weekend routes and involve their teenage children."

Mary Orr, who covers two weekly routes and was the Board President several times, is currently the longest-serving volunteer, with nearly 26 years of service. Angela Creaven, who also began volunteering in 1994, just retired from service.

Jan Jezek, a 20-year Meals on Wheels volunteer, is now a client. He and his wife, Hi-Ja Kim, sometimes receive meals from the volunteers Jezek once worked alongside. "I admire that they are still working with open hearts," he said. "It was a pleasure to be part of an excellent organization with so many nice people."

To learn more about receiving meals, becoming a volunteer or making a donation to Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels, call (805) 683-1565 or visit [www.mealsonwheelssb.org](http://www.mealsonwheelssb.org).

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**Santa Barbara Meals on Wheels** is a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of seniors and homebound individuals in Santa Barbara. Since 1971, Meals on Wheels has delivered one hot meal a day, 365 days a year, to those who are unable to shop or cook for themselves.

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