



Community Bulletin

When a FEMA program really made sense....

Having learned during the Thomas Fire in 2017, we know **Clear Purpose, Speed and Continuous Adaptation** are keys for responding to any community crisis.

On April 24th when Governor Gavin Newsom announced a restaurant/senior meal collaboration to rescue "locally owned" small restaurants while providing homebound seniors with three meals a day, HELP of Ojai immediately jumped at the chance to spearhead this project within the Ojai Valley. Having learned how to quickly react to crisis during the 2017 Thomas Fire, we knew the best path forward was one of speed and community collaboration. Ventura County Area Agency on Aging was responsible for the county-wide effort but gave us the go ahead to run with it since it would take them time to put the program together for the entire county.

What came to be known as The Great Plates is a program that perfectly fits the Ojai Valley. With its high per capita senior population, with many living on low fixed incomes, coupled with dozens of small locally owned restaurants struggling to survive (chain and franchise restaurants are not allowed in the city limits), this program could help these restaurants survive.

Following Newsom's announcement, the HELP of Ojai staff huddled (with proper social distancing) to develop a list of restaurants we believed could handle the program and whose food matched the needs of senior diners. Invitations for a Zoom meeting went out over the weekend and by Monday, April 27th, we were Zooming with the 14th restaurants and developing the program.

Since then 14 restaurants have prepared and HELP of Ojai's repurposed staff and a few volunteers have delivered 26,145 meals and put \$575,190 into the local restaurants in this community. The restaurants have this to say about the program:



Food Harmonics
www.foodharmonicsojai.com



"When I closed Food Harmonics on March 20th, I literally said it would take a miracle to survive this pandemic. We had just heavily invested in a new (fabulous) brunch menu and expected the busy spring tourist season to pay for it. So, with more debt than we usually have and suddenly zero revenue it looked super bleak. And then the miracle happened. Through the Great Plates program, we are not only paying off our debt, but also giving ourselves an opportunity to see if we can survive after the pandemic with a new and improved business model. Food Harmonics has always been about providing the highest and best nutrition to support our community and now we are further inspired to find ways to offer our nutritious food to seniors and populations in need." ~ Gabriella Chesneau

"When we were called to see if we wanted to participate in the Great Plates program with HELP of Ojai, we were overjoyed. Never did we anticipate the impact that it would have on our bottom line. When we closed in March due to COVID19, we were left with a mountain of debt, to vendors, rent, utilities and more with no income to bring them current. Thanks to the opportunity to be a part of this program, we have been able to slowly but surely get things current.

Continued on next page...



I can't say enough about the help and support we have received from HELP of Ojai, and how thoughtfully they have implemented the program in Ojai, giving a little to each of our restaurants, as to help us all.

And of course, it goes without saying how rewarding it has been for the whole Sea Fresh team to know that these are going to seniors who so appreciate the meals. From the kitchen staff who is preparing the balanced meals, to the servers who are putting them together for delivery." ~ Myra and Gus

THE VINE

308 E. Ojai Avenue
Ojai, CA 93023

"This program brought in a REAL lifeline. We took over our business at the start of the year, so we had no annual revenue or labor to use for federal programs like the PPP. It really was feeling like our business was slipping away from us as it was barely leaving the ground. Aside from the much-needed revenue this program provided; it gave us a chance to once again be genuinely of service to our community." ~ Sam and Amber Gay

The key to successfully pulling this off has been dedicating one staff, Megan Telfer, with assistance from two others, Jayn Walter and Tina Rosas. They developed the logistics behind 14 restaurants preparing daily breakfast, lunch and dinner (a set) and having seven routes of HELP of Ojai staff and a few volunteer drivers get it to 250 seniors in 90 minutes (to ensure food safety). The logistical flow and ensuring that each route of seniors receive a rotating set of food from different restaurants each day is a process any business would be proud to own. Coupled with people joining the program and others dropping off every few days, the management of this "supply chain" is truly a herculean effort. From notifying the restaurants almost a week in advance for food ordering, to anticipating demand ups and downs, and flattening the peaks and valleys of that, the efficiency of this program is remarkable.

The other key early benefit for this program was, that because we are a healthy non-profit with a solid Balance Sheet, we were able to get cash into the hands of the restaurants within days. With an average payable turnaround of 48 hours, cash strapped restaurants could buy the food and pay their staffs while digging out of the hole the previous five weeks had created. It was four weeks before the County could begin paying HELP of Ojai with the FEMA money earmarked for the program. All the while, we were able to "finance" the program and get much needed funds to the restaurants. This is because we operate with a "for-profit" fiscal approach to delivering much needed services to the community.

Some will ask "what's in it for you, as the non-profit?"

Both sets of beneficiaries – seniors and employers – are our clients, directly or indirectly. Seniors are our focal clients and restaurants employ people in the community who would otherwise be our low-income assistance clients if they lose their jobs. We were able to help two large groups of community members with one program.

Great Plates 2 was launched June 11th and will go for another month. While it will not result in the numbers and dollars that Great Plates 1 did, it will be tens of thousands of meals and hundreds of thousands of dollars more going into the broader Ojai valley community.

Stay safe, healthy and at home. We miss you.

Terri Wolfe

Executive Director, HELP of Ojai

West Campus • Kerry Ballantine • 370 W. Baldwin Rd., Ojai • (805) 649-9218

HELP's West Campus remains closed to the general public until further notice. This includes our 2nd HELPPings Thrift Store Donation Center. Please call Kerry Ballantine at (805) 649-9218 with any questions regarding West Campus.

Activities Update • Little House, 111 W. Santa Ana Street, Ojai • (805) 646-5122

We miss all of our activity participants here at Little House! Our halls are quiet – there are no bursts of laughter from Bridge or Mah Jongg, no copies to be made for Creative Writing, Guitar and Spanish, and no scramble for the best spot for Tai Chi and Chair Yoga. We hope that each of you are able to stay inside and have human connection at a safe distance. We are thinking of each of you and please, do not hesitate to reach out if you are in need. We are always here for you!

As we continue to practice self-quarantining and social distancing, senior activities will remain closed until further notice. To protect the instructors and the participants, we will use an abundance of caution before re-opening any activities. When we do re-open our activities, we will first consult with instructors on a schedule. We will then send the new schedule to everyone through our Community Bulletin list. Please be patient, as your safety is our priority!

Transportation • Tina Rosas, Transportation Director • (805) 646-7787

Transportation will continue with essential rides to the grocery store and doctor's appointments. Each ride will be considered on a case by case basis.

All drivers and riders will have their temperature checked prior to getting on the vans and are required to wear face coverings at all times. If you have a temperature, we will not be able to accommodate you at that time and you will need to reschedule your ride. We encourage you to stay home if you are not feeling well.

You might have seen our vans driving all over the valley. We have been delivering meals for the Great Plates Restaurant Program, which will end July 10th. What a wonderful experience it has been to work together for a common good!

We are not sure what the next few months will look like but hope to see you all soon! Please call Tina if you need to schedule a ride or have your prescriptions picked up at 805-646-5122 x105.

Community Assistance Program • Keshia Davis, Program Director

(805) 640-3320 • 108 Fox St., Ojai 93023 • Fax: (805) 640-3322

Please call the Community Assistance Program at the above number if you are in need of food, or need advice or assistance of how to safely maintain social distancing if you are without permanent housing.

2nd HELPPings Thrift Store • Naomi Babcock • 841 E. Ojai Ave., Ojai • (805) 646-5812

2nd HELPPings Donation Center • Tobias Minniear • 370 W. Baldwin Road, Ojai • (805) 649-8750

2nd HELPPings Thrift Store and Donation Center are closed until further notice. There will be NO Saturday Sales for the months of May, June, July and August. Please check our website or Facebook page for status of the 2nd HELPPings Thrift Store and Donation Center. We will post re-open dates when they are established.

Please **DO NOT** leave donations at any of HELP of Ojai's sites. This will take resources away from where they are needed most at this time. Thank you for your cooperation and support!

Our deepest appreciation goes out to those who made contributions in the months of April, May and June, 2020. Your donation in support of HELP's programs is valued greatly.

Contributions and Memorials received in April, May and June of 2020 will be published in HELP of Ojai's September/October Community Bulletin.

Please call Kerry Ballantine at (805) 649-9218 if you have any questions.

HELP of Ojai, Inc.
111 W. Santa Ana St.
P.O. Box 621
Ojai, CA 93024

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



HELP of Ojai, Inc. — *Neighbors HELPing Neighbors*

If you would like to be removed from the Community Bulletin mailing list, or wish to receive your Bulletin via email, please call Kerry Ballantine at 649-9218 or email her at kerryb@helpofojai.org.

The HELP of Ojai staff is exhausted.

Between not closing during the COVID-19 Stay-at-Home time period and delivering tens of thousands of meals, hundreds of food boxes, providing hundreds of rides to the grocery store and doctors office and on and on, we all need some time off. The staff hasn't taken any time off since February and we all need it. Many weeks we worked six or seven days a week.

Please understand that we are going into a very limited service level from July 8th to August 31st in order to give every staff member a vacation. We will have a small staff covering phones and providing essential service transportation and delivering senior meals only.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you in September when we will have more information about the reopening of some programs.

Until then, stay healthy.

Terri Wolfe