



Gail Arnold

Board Chair and volunteer Kelly Onnen, Vice Chair and volunteer Dave Gonzales, and Treasurer and volunteer Kathy Denlinger

Food from the Heart Holds Fundraiser

Program Provides Tasty Food to Homebound, Ill People

Thursday, April 5, 2018

By [Gail Arnold](#)

On March 29, enthusiastic supporters of Food from the Heart (FFH) gathered for their 5th annual Sips and Nibbles event to raise funds for FFH's program of providing tasty and nourishing food to homebound, ill individuals. While the event was a fundraiser, it felt more like a group of dear friends gathering for a celebration.

A sold out crowd of about 100 guests mingled in the scenic courtyard at El Paseo and in the tasting rooms of Margerum Wine Company, Happy Canyon Vineyard, and Grassini Family Vineyards while sipping wines from each and sampling nibbles from Wine Cask Restaurant, C'est Cheese, Renaud's Patisserie & Bistro, the Chocolate Gallery, and Food from the Heart's own professional chef, Aaron Casale. During the brief program, Executive Director Sharon Byrne thanked all of the businesses for

generously donating in these difficult times.

Founded in 1994, Food from the Heart provides high-quality, nutritious, tasty food to about 160 housebound, seriously ill people each week in Santa Barbara and Goleta. With a lean staff of four part-time employees and a core group of 50 regular volunteers (and many more occasional volunteers), Food from the Heart prepares and delivers a bag of food each week to clients free of charge. The organization's name, according to Board Chair Kelly Onnen, reflects all the love that goes into each bag of food.

Most fruits and vegetables are donated by area residents and harvested by a dozen or so volunteers. Veggie Rescue in Santa Ynez also contributes produce. Bread is donated by Panera Bread, Vons, and Ethnic Breads. Last year, about 50,000 pounds of produce and bread came in. Food that is not used is given to other nonprofits.

Volunteers prepare the food under Casale's direction at Trinity Lutheran Church, which has donated its kitchen and fellowship hall for years. Another group of volunteers packs the food and another delivers it. The drivers visit with clients and some assist with chores on separate visits.

Each bag contains an estimated \$90 worth of food and is designed to last at least four days. Soup, an entree, a baked casserole, a couple of salads, a bag of fruit, dessert, and bread are all included. Not only is the food tasty and nutritious, it is also visually appealing, which Onnen explained is important to entice clients who have poor appetites.

"It's a fabulous, heartfelt program," said Onnen. "So many in our community struggle with serious illnesses and lack resources to obtain freshly prepared food that can nourish them back to health. We love being that resource for them. It truly is a calling of love."

Most clients are referred from medical agencies, with many coming through Hospice of Santa Barbara, the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara, Cottage Health, and Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care. Clients can self-refer, in which case the vetting is more extensive to ensure a legitimate need. There is always a waitlist, but it is typically short. Triage practice ensures that the most needy always receive food.

I spoke with several volunteers and all of them related how much they enjoy the work, one describing it as a privilege, another as her meditation. Byrne shared how she hadn't thought "all those people that you read about in fairy tales, the ones who escort the little children out of the woods who are lost" and render other aid, were real, but after coming to FFH, she realized that they are, and they work at FFH.

Cash donations and fresh produce donations are always needed. Byrne said that while they are blessed with many wonderful volunteers, they are always happy to welcome new ones to the Food from the Heart family. For more info, go to sbfoodfromtheheart.com.

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Executive Director Sharon Byrne and Executive Chef Aaron Casale



Julie Hinkle, Katherine Mueller, and Patti Duell



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Renaud's Patisserie and Bistro's macaroon tower.



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Guests mingle in Margerum's Tasting Room.



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Guests listen to the program.



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Founder and volunteer Evelyn Jacob and volunteer Genevieve Antonow



Renaud Gonthier and Christy Jones.



Volunteer Irma Russell, Boardmember and volunteer Jean Howard, and volunteer Mary Ann Lund



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Dave Gonzales sells a wingspan of raffle tickets for \$40.



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Happy Canyon Vineyard Tasting Room Manager Allison Kross and C'est Cheese owner Kathryn Graham.



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Boardmembers and volunteers Carmen Ortiz and Mahsheed Ayoub