

Food from the Heart Expands Its Harvest Opportunities with Truck, New Refrigerator

Homebound clients benefit from nonprofit meal delivery service, but organization wants — and needs — to do more



Students at Santa Barbara High School's Visual Arts & Design Academy put their skills and creativity to work transforming Food from the Heart's flatbed truck into a rolling promotion for the organization's harvest efforts. (Jay Farbman photo)

By Lara Cooper, Noozhawk Staff Writer | [@laraanncooper](#) | April 11, 2015 | 5:00 p.m.

Santa Barbara County has such an abundance of fruit trees that it's not unusual to drive by lemon groves or even neighborhood orange trees and spot unharvested fruit hitting the ground.

One nonprofit organization is working hard to capture that glorious produce and get it into the hands of people who may need that nutrition the most, but are too sick to go out and get it themselves.

Food from the Heart (<http://sbfoodfromtheheart.com/>) works each week to create beautiful, nutritious meals for people who are homebound and may be reaching the end of their lives through hospice or enduring the hardship of chemotherapy.

On a recent Wednesday, volunteers were busily moving about the fellowship hall at **Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church** (<http://www.telcsb.org/>), 909 N. La Cumbre Road, packaging up fresh green salads, pushing trays of lemon garlic chicken and hearty ratatouille, and packing bags of fresh picked local fruit, almost all of which came from the organization's harvesting program.

About 75 volunteers work during the week to plan a menu, prep the food and cook, package and deliver it to homebound clients.

Food from the Heart delivers about 160 bags per week, and interim executive director **Kelly Onnen** (http://www.noozhawk.com/article/020511_food_from_the_heart_kelly_onnen) said there's a waiting list of people who would like to be on the delivery circuit. But the organization is maxed out based on what the church's kitchen can handle.

Bread is also donated each week from **Our Daily Bread** (<http://ourdailybread.net>) and **Panera Bakery** (<https://www.panerabread.com/en-us/home.html>), and any surplus bread that Food from the Heart doesn't use is given to clients at **Unity Shoppe** (<http://www.unityshoppe.org/>).



With its freshly detailed flatbed truck, Food from the Heart is now turning its attention to fundraising for programs that will help it further expand its operations. (**Jay Farbman** (<http://www.jayfarbman.com>) photo)

Food from the Heart finds most of its clients through referrals, from places like **Hospice of Santa Barbara** (<http://www.hospiceofsantabarbara.org>), the **Cancer Center of Santa Barbara** (<http://www.sansumclinic.org/cancer-center>) and dialysis centers.

Onnen said people can also request the service themselves, but must have a doctor's certificate that describes their need.

“A lot of people would like this food,” she said, and that those with money for a caregiver or who have family to help with their needs likely would not qualify for the meals.

One bag of food will last each client about five days, and is filled with food that is not only nutritious but looks beautiful as well.

Onnen admits she and the volunteers are “foodies,” and take pride in each container of food being beautiful to the eye. That’s important since many of their clients are ill and have diminished appetites.

The citrus they harvest goes into making fresh salad dressings from scratch, Onnen said, and any whole organic fruit they find is also included in the bags.

Last Wednesday, the group harvested about six crates of oranges, which were loaded into a donated flatbed truck driven by Tom Urban, who coordinates the harvesting effort and has worked with the organization for the past 2½ years.

Urban often keeps an eye out for extra fruit while he’s driving around town and will leave a note for the owners, asking for permission to harvest it. He’s got an impressive list of people who have already allowed him to come on their property — including commercial ranches and urban backyards — and harvest with a group of volunteers.



A VADA student works on a flourish on the side of Food for the Heart’s harvest truck.(Jay Farbman (<http://www.jayfarbman.com>) photo)

“Nothing is too big and nothing is too small,” he told [Noozhawk](http://www.noozhawk.com) (<http://www.noozhawk.com>) .

Urban encouraged people who have fruit trees or extra produce on their properties to reach out to him if they’re interested in having volunteer harvesters collect it for Food from the Heart clients. He can be contacted at a 805.965.5152 or at urbantj@cox.net (<mailto:urbantj@cox.net?subject=Noozhawk%20Referral>) .

Food from the Heart is also able to share any produce it doesn't use with nonprofits like the [Organic Soup Kitchen](http://organicsoupkitchen.org) and others.

"There's enough food out there for us to all share," Onnen said.

About two years ago, a truck was donated to Food from the Heart to assist with the harvesting. Last year, it was used to collect 54,000 pounds of fresh produce.

Students at the [Visual Arts & Design Academy](https://sites.google.com/a/sbsdk12.org/vada/) at [Santa Barbara High School](http://sbhs.sbunified.org) gave the truck some personality by designing the detailing and the sign boards that line its sides.

The teenagers were able to work on the project in class and provided their services at no charge, Onnen said. The truck was completed about three weeks ago.

Food from the Heart also collects unsold produce from [Fairview Gardens](http://www.fairviewgardens.org/) as well as fruit and vegetables from [the farm on the campus](http://sbcommunity.org/get-involved/farm/) of [Santa Barbara Community Church](http://sbcommunity.org).

Onnen is always looking for more farms and stores to step up and donate produce, however.

"We'd like to think at some point we don't even have to buy produce," she said.

With the truck up and running with the harvesting program, Onnen is turning to Food from the Heart's next big challenge: installing a commercial walk-in fridge and freezer.

Donors stepped up when the group [first began fundraising](http://www.noozhawk.com/article/080912_food_from_heart_fundraising_new_refrigerator) in 2012, but it has taken two years to get the permits for the projects. Construction costs have risen in the meantime.

Installing the 8-foot by 8-foot fridge with adjoining freezer will "revolutionize what we do," Onnen said.

The addition will compliment the harvesting program by allowing the volunteers to refrigerate fruit instead of using it right away, as they do now.

The group has raised enough money for the fridge itself, but needs about \$10,000 to help with construction costs.

Paul Franz Construction has donated services as the project's general contractor and architectural services were donated by Susan Sherwin of Bildsten + Sherwin Design Studios. But money is still needed for the labor and installation.

Food from the Heart will also be holding a fundraiser for operational costs from 5 to 7 p.m. April 17 at the [Margerum](http://www.margerumwinecompany.com/), [Au Bon Climat](http://www.aubonclimat.com/) and [Grassini Vineyards](http://www.grassinifamilyvineyards.com/) wine tasting rooms, at 813 Anacapa St.

The cost is \$50 per person, and admission includes wine tasting in all three tasting rooms and appetizers by [Wine Cask](http://www.winecask.com/), [C'Est Cheese](http://www.cestcheese.com/) and others.

For more information about the event, contact Onnen at info@sbfoodfromtheheart.com (mailto:info@sbfoodfromtheheart.com?subject=Noozhawk%20Referral) or at 805.334.5292.

[Click here for more information](http://sbfoodfromtheheart.com/) (http://sbfoodfromtheheart.com/) about Food from the Heart. [Click here to make an online donation](http://sbfoodfromtheheart.com/donations/) (http://sbfoodfromtheheart.com/donations/).

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