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NONPROFITS

Food from the Heart, Coastal Quilters Guild Team Up to Comfort, Support Homebound Residents

Hand-stitched quilted placements, each with a heart, accompany homemade meals delivered to 130 South Coast clients



Food from the Heart volunteers prepare and deliver homemade meals weekly to 130 homebound South Coast residents. (Food from the Heart photo)

By Rochelle Rose, Noozhawk Contributing Writer | [@NoozhawkSociety](#) | Published on 02.20.2012

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The ongoing work of the **Food from the Heart** organization was enhanced recently



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through collaboration with the **Coastal Quilters Guild of Santa Barbara & Goleta**.



Food from the Heart prepares and delivers homemade meals weekly to 130

homebound South Coast residents who are going through some kind of medical crisis or are recovering from surgery or illness. An added benefit is that the prepared food gives a much-needed respite to family and/or caregivers.

Last week, each grocery bag, carefully packed with prepared meals for up to four days, had an additional homemade treat — an enclosed one-of-a-kind, hand-stitched quilted placement. Although all were different, each had a heart sewn on it. The placements also had a hangar, so they could be hung on the wall, often near the patient’s bed.

“These placements were literally pieces of art,” said Kelli Onnen, an organizer for Food from the Heart. “For a lot of our clients, we are their only connection to the outside world. The placements were so well-received. To a homebound patient, it meant that somebody really cared and that someone took the time to create something beautiful for them. Everyone took them out and put them to use. The response was amazing, even the men. They were all so thankful and so happy.”



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The Coastal Quilters Guild has 275 members whose fingers fly — helping out in quiet ways all over the community. All of their quilting projects are donated to nonprofits. The projects are considered and approved by the group. Past quilts have benefited **St. Vincent’s**, the **Community Action Commission**, seniors, the poor, the underserved and teenage mothers.

The quilters are an active group. More than 100 members show up for meetings, held on the second Thursday of the month at **St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church**, to listen to an educational speaker on some aspect of quilting or sewing. There are also “Open Sew” events at the **Goleta Valley Community Center** in which it’s “bring your own machine” and quilters sew together as a group. Quilters also sew at home on the approved community project quilts. In addition, 12 satellite groups work at home or at adult education classes. There are few idle hands in this group!

Barbara MacCallum, one of the chairwomen who presents quilting projects for the group to consider, says the group has helped thousands of people in the community over the years.

Last week’s Valentine’s Day food packages from Food from the Heart included the handmade placements as well as donations of biscotti and candy packages.

The number of clients served by Food from the Heart is limited to 130 because of the space and physical limitations of the kitchen space, which is donated by **Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church** on North La Cumbre Road. Tuesdays are dedicated to just food preparation, and the prepared food is cooked, packaged and delivered on Wednesdays. A cadre of 65 volunteers either prepare, cook, package or deliver 130 meals daily 52 weeks a year.

“On a budget of just \$165,000 a year, we provide 6,760 meals, which typically lasts four days due to the diminished appetites of people who are ill,” Onnen said. “That is 27,040 days of food or \$6 a day to feed a homebound patient.”

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Clients referred by different organizations, such as **Hospice of Santa Barbara, Cottage Hospital**, a dialysis center, **Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care** as well as self-referrals.

“We usually have a waiting list of 10 clients,” said Onnen, a volunteer for more than eight years. “We do everything we can to serve them as quickly as possible.”

The menu depends on what is available and low-cost. The menu always includes a quart of fresh-made soup (soup is easy to digest and is nourishing for ill patients), a casserole (macaroni and cheese, lasagna, tamale pie, brown rice/lemon chicken), plus roasted vegetables, ham salad, green salad, fresh fruit and a dessert. Most food comes as donations from the **Foodbank of Santa Barbara County** and community gardens. For this reason, the menu changes every week.

Nutritionist and chef Robin Monroe identifies the food for the week and then makes up the menu and recipes. The ingredients are highly nutritious. This week’s menu included fresh yams, Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower; the soup was turkey chili with corn.

“We usually have to buy meat, spices and oils, which are rarely donated. But our biggest cost is for containers. We spend nearly \$25,000 a year on plastic containers. Because we are serving people who are sick, they can’t be reused,” Onnen said. “Our biggest donors are **Jordano’s, Whole Foods, Community West Bank** and an anonymous donor who pays for a \$500 food credit for milk at the Foodbank for us.

“Ninety percent of our clients are low income. Our parameter is illness. If they are sick, we feed them. Our clients are very sweet. Sometimes we receive donations of \$10 a week from clients who are receiving food – they are so thankful. Or a grateful son or daughter. We would like to see more money coming in. We are not a big and shiny nonprofit. We pretty much fly under the radar. Some foundations help us. Our database has only 400 people on it.

“I have volunteered for many years. It feeds my soul. This is the best thing I do every week.. It is instant gratification; I know it is appreciated and making a difference in peoples’ lives.”

For more information on Food from the Heart, [click here](#) or call Robin Monroe, executive chef and director, at 805.898.3981. [Click here](#) for more information on the Coastal Quilters Guild.

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