

## HOMELES IN PARADISE

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### ASHES FROM THE FOOD BANK FIRE

*...chocolate Easter eggs and coconut Passover macaroons in a basket*

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**IF YOUR HEART** was pricked by the thorny March 21 fire that decimated four Monterey County Food Bank refrigerated delivery trucks, and damaged the warehouse in Salinas, relax. Food was again flowing to the hungry by Mon., March 30.

Thanks to the generous support of the business and private community, people joined forces to fend off hunger by helping buy, deliver and serve food to the local pantries and branches of the food bank. Many had no prior knowledge of what a food bank is or does. Do you?

For instance, are you aware that despite the Monterey Peninsula's reputation as "Paradise" and its luxurious high-end properties, one in five residents of Monterey County faced hunger because of the cruel act perpetrated by a yet-unidentified hooded arsonist caught on a surveillance camera? Or that between 20,000 and 30,000 children, around 7000 of them homeless, may have missed some meals?

According to the Food Bank for Monterey County's website, "Hunger is epidemic in Monterey County. One-fifth of the population receives food assistance. The Food Bank for Monterey County now serves 88,700 people."

### Definition Of A Food Bank

According to Wikipedia: "In the US, cities will often have a single food bank which acts as a centralized warehouse and will serve several hundred front line agencies. Like a blood bank, that warehouse serves as a single collection and distribution point for food donations. A food bank operates a lot like a for-profit food distributor, but in this case, it distributes food to charities, not to food retailers.

On the Monterey Peninsula, the Salvation Army, one of the main agencies that serves the homeless, was "hit pretty hard" by the act of arson, according to Lt. Paul Swain. By Tues., March 31, The Gathering Place, which provides weekly meals and other services for homeless women, served ice cream to celebrate TGP's first anniversary because the Food Bank for Monterey County had delivered it to the food pantry from which The Gathering Place relies on, in part.

Wikipedia explains: "For many US food banks, most of their donated food comes from food left over from the normal processes of for-profit companies. It can come from any part of the food chain, e.g. from growers who have produced too much or whose food is not sufficiently visually appealing; from manufacturers who

overproduced; or from retailers who over-ordered. Often the product is approaching or past its "sell by" date. In such cases, the food bank liaises with the food industry and with regulators to make sure the food is safe and legal to distribute and eat."

### **Food Bank Lines**

Are you surprised that family shopping at a Food Bank resembles a Russian bread line before Perestroika in 1989? Hundreds of people begin to line up, warmly wrapped to fend off early-morning chill, and end up sweltering.

Seasoned Food Bank regulars come prepared to wait with folding chairs, shopping carts, luggage carriers or wagons with wheels. First arrivals get the choicest picks, starting with breads and other non-perishable high-carb items like desserts, macaroni, and ziti.

Volunteers load participants' goods into and onto carts like the Clip Art sketch shown above, as buggies, hand trucks and wheelchair transportation moves past stations where the goods have been unloaded from refrigerated trucks.

Food Bank goodies may be pre-bagged or stacked for hauling, often in bulk: sacks of beans, rice, spaghetti; cans of soup, sauces, fruits, and vegetables; meats such as frozen pork patties and sausages by the dozen; eggs, cheese, milk; pallets of 12 1-pound cartons of organic strawberries worth \$5 each retail value; potatoes, onions, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots. If it's Easter, perhaps chocolate eggs, or Passover, Kosher coconut-covered macaroons.

The difference between Russia's queues and our food bank lines is vast: they took what they got, paid in rubles, or went without. Here, few pay or go without for long. Since the first U.S. food bank concept became operative in 1967 as an alternative to food stamps/government-surplus programs, "shoppers" have had free choice: take what is offered or leave it for others. The food bank concept now operates on seven continents.

### **Food Banks For Seniors**

While most beneficiaries of local branches of the Food Bank for Monterey County receive assistance, seniors active in local churches or participating senior centers are welcome to take part regardless of monthly incomes. Rich and poor alike are welcome, and equally took home recent Food Bank brussels sprouts, celery, apples, pears and broccoli from the Monday Food Bank in Scholze Park Community Center, New Monterey where boxes of garden produce, bread, fruit, and some canned goods are lined up rummage-sale style on tables.

"Shoppers" pick and choose free of charge, unlike the Wednesday-morning farmer's market at Sally Griffin Meals on wheels that charges minimal fees for foods. I use the term "shopping" to mean "being selective of the goods one receives."

I have participated in Food Bank programs for three years at Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula, preparing the free Food Bank bounty I could not otherwise afford on my \$889 monthly social security income. I prepared around 60 rich creamy potato salads for 30 men from I-HELP (Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program). That's 1800 servings at \$0 except for a few eggs and jars of mayonnaise. The free potatoes are like chocolate eggs in my Easter basket.

### **The Homeless Benefit Indirectly**

Since most houseless people have no place to store or cook food, they get indirect help by receiving food from agencies served by the Food Bank, such as outreach ministries that serve meals on the beach, Shelter Outreach Plus and The Salvation Army.

You may add symbolic Passover coconut-covered macaroons or chocolate Easter eggs to the baskets of Hungry Monterey County residents of all ages. According to Food Bank for Monterey County, a \$1 donation

provides \$5 worth of food, and 95 cents of every donated dollar goes directly to the food program. Details at [www.foodbankformontereycounty.org](http://www.foodbankformontereycounty.org) . Happy Easter and Passover.

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