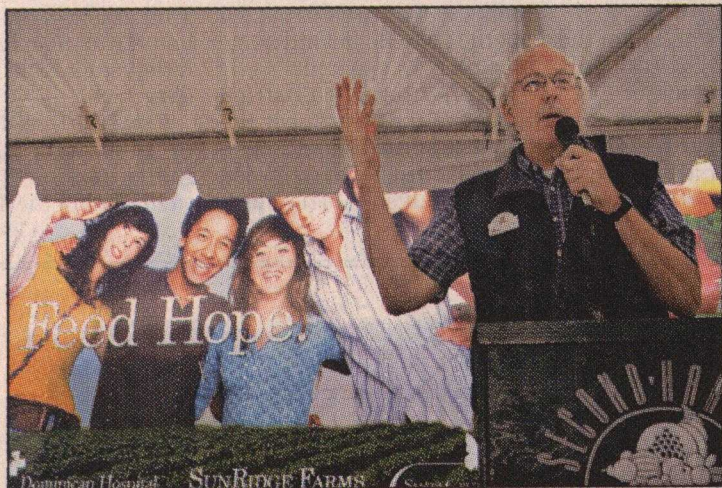


40 years of service



JAMES TENSUAN/SENTINEL

Attendees take a tour of the Second Harvest Food Bank before the ceremony to mark the organization's 40th anniversary.



JAMES TENSUAN/SENTINEL

Willy Elliott-McCrea, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank, addresses the crowd during their 40th anniversary.

Second Harvest Food Bank celebrates four decades of community feeding in Watsonville

Food Banks

By ROMAIN FONSEGRIVES

rfonsegrives@santacruzsentinel.com

WATSONVILLE — A crowd of more than 250 people gathered Friday in front of Second Harvest Food Bank's warehouse to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the organization.

Former and present board trustees, advisers and volunteers enjoyed a barbecue under the arbor set up on the parking lot. Among the assembly, original founder Michael Alexander had flown in from West Palm Springs Beach, Fla., to attend the celebration.

"It's amazing, this is exactly what I had in mind," Alexander said. "It has grown from that little food bank in Harvey West to that wonderful, monstrous operation in Watsonville that serves thousands of people."

Second Harvest Food Bank started off as a small initiative in 1972, on Harvey West Boulevard in Santa Cruz. Alexander, a volunteer with the federal program VISTA — later to be known as AmeriCorps VISTA — was assigned a mission with the Breakfast for Kids Program for Santa Cruz County. Alexander, then 26,

SEE FOOD ON C3

FOOD

Continued from C1

was collecting food donations when he received a call from a Watsonville farmer offering 40 tons of frozen cauliflower, he said.

Alexander spent three months navigating giant, stacked-up-to-the-ceiling freezers, distributing the crispy vegetable to agencies all over California, he said. The Santa Cruz operation eventually ran out, but the inquiries did not.

"The phone was still ringing because everybody was facing such a great need for food," Alexander said. "So we went looking for it."

That year, the Santa Cruz organization collected 300,000 pounds of food and turned into the first California food bank and the second in the nation. Second Harvest now distributes 8.4 million pounds of food each year in Santa Cruz County, Chief Executive Officer Willy Elliott-McCrea said. The nonprofit works with 200 local agencies and programs, serving 55,000 county residents

"I feel really proud and honored that we've been able to engage the community this much. I go home tired and happy every night."

WILLY ELLIOTT-MCCREA, Second Harvest Food Bank CEO

annually.

"I feel really proud and honored that we've been able to engage the community this much," Elliott-McCrea said. "I go home tired and happy every night."

Elliott-McCrea has been running operations since 1988, he said. For 25 years, he watched Second Harvest expand to meet the challenges of the needy. The food bank moved to its 14,000-square-foot warehouse in 1986. Two years later, the Loma Prieta Earthquake uprooted thousands of residents, forcing the charity to double its operation.

The latest test was the economic recession that started in 2008. Residents needing food assistance rose from 35,000 each month to 56,000 per month in 2011. This led the food bank to cut 25 percent of its deliveries to each family, Elliott-McCrea said.

"We're doing more with

less ultimately," Elliott-McCrea said.

Depressing economics did not prevent to undergo a philosophy change since 2005. The food bank gradually shifted its focus from meeting food needs to providing clients with better nutrition, Elliott-McCrea said. Second Harvest launched its "Passion for Produce" program in 2010, which provides residents with fresh fruits and vegetables, and educates families through 200 nutrition ambassadors, providing in-depth food counseling and healthy recipes.

Second Harvest's 10-year plan looks to target obesity and put families back on their feet, Elliott-McCrea said.

"This is wonderful, all of this, but you also have to wonder what it means," Elliott-McCrea said. "There are just too many people in food lines these days."