

Second Harvest buys home base



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Rep. Sam Farr (D-Salinas, left) joins Willy Elliot-McCrea (second from left), executive director of Second Harvest Food Bank, and others Thursday in a celebration of the food bank's purchase of the 15,000-square-foot building it has rented for the past 18 years at 15 Errington Road.

Food bank purchases building it has rented for past 18 years

By KATHERINE MORRIS
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

After nearly 18 years of shelling out rent checks every month, Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties will soon hold the deed to its Watsonville home base.

Thanks to several community donations and \$300,000 in federal funding secured by Rep. Sam Farr (D-Salinas), the food bank is expected to close escrow on its current 15,000-square-foot facility on Ohlone Parkway (formerly Errington Road) at the end of the month.

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"Now we'll really be able to make some of the necessary changes around here to keep up with the needs of our community," Willy Elliot-McCrea, executive director of Second Harvest, said during a festive celebration held in honor of the sale on Thursday.

The first order of business includes the installation of loading docks, pallet racks and new sprinklers, Elliot-McCrea said.

"We've been moving 6 million racks of food a year out of this place without any of these pallet racks, which really adds a lot of extra work for our volunteers," he said. "We could also use another cooler, too. There's been days when we've had more donated food than we were able to store."

"This is so important because our food distribution has gone up 40 percent in the last six years and shows no signs of slowing. It's getting harder and harder for families to put food on the table. We're expecting that we'll be distributing twice as much food 10 years from now and have to be ready."

Farr was one of two-dozen or so in attendance at Thursday's event.

"I'm really in awe of what you've been able to do here," Farr told the crowd. "To be able to demonstrate and sustain — for such a length of time — this kind of compassion by reaching out to those people in need."

He also praised food bank volunteers and donors for their efforts.

"You're basically running a \$10 million corporation here on almost nothing but volunteers," he said.

The event also provided a chance to thank community members whose monetary donations helped make the purchase a reality, including Richard and Mary Solari, Jack and Peggy Baskin, Plantronics and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation.

"This is a great thing — not only for the food bank, but for our community as well — because it will enable us to dedicate ourselves solely to feeding people," said Jeffrey Kongsli, director of development and marking for Second Harvest. The food bank is purchasing the building from the Buckwald family for roughly \$1.4 million — a deal that's been years in the making.

"This also means that the community truly owns this food bank," Kongsli added.

Locally, Second Harvest provides food each month for 47,000 people, including 20,000 children, and distributes 6 million pounds of food each year in Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Ninety percent of Second Harvest clients served are children, seniors, disabled or working poor.

Also on Thursday, Second Harvest announced that tickets have gone on sale for its upcoming Santa Cruz Chef's Dinner scheduled for Sept. 23 at Holy Cross in Santa Cruz. One hundred percent of monies raised from the annual fund-raising event will go to support the food bank. To reserve a seat, call 722-7110, ext. 217 or visit www.thefoodbank.org.

For more information on how to donate, volunteer or become an advocate for Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties, call 722-7110 or send donations to P.O. Box 990, Watsonville, CA 95077.