



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

**Patrick Dwire, a volunteer at Loaves & Fishes on Second Street, keeps count of lunches served on a daily basis at the Watsonville community food pantry and kitchen.**

# Nonprofit food pantry and kitchen attempting to extend 15-year run

## Loaves & Fishes to put on special fund-raising drive

By KATHERINE MORRIS  
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

"It's awesome!"

That's how Watsonville resident Andy Hardy and others like her, who often struggle just to put food on the table, describe the hot-lunch program at Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry and Kitchen on Second Street.

"I reserve the use of that word for describing this place," Hardy said with a gentle smile as she finished her meal of tamales, vegetables and potato salad Wednesday.

"The food is delicious. They really provide a great service — giving

They really provide a great service — giving food to people that don't have any money to buy food.

— Watsonville resident Andy Hardy

ing food to people that don't have any money to buy food. I come here every day that they're open," Hardy said while reaching her hand out to a meal program volunteer to offer an appreciative handshake.

Hardy is just one recipient of the

more than 150,000 meals and 100,000 bags of groceries that Loaves & Fishes has provided to those in need in and around Watsonville over the years.

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## DRIVE

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This year, Loaves & Fishes is celebrating its 15th anniversary, and in order to keep the program going for another 15 years in these tight economic times, staff and volunteers are hosting a special spring fund-raising drive to generate donations and volunteers.

"This year, in our 15th year, we're really just trying to continue providing the services that we do with as much efficiency as possible," said Phil Fisher, director of Loaves & Fishes. "To do that, we're hoping to find ways to become even more community supported in terms of finances."

The nonprofit organization currently depends on a mix of grants and donations — of both money and food — to keep its kitchen open and its clients' bellies full.

"We've really found that we end up supporting a lot of the farm workers and their families, particularly in the winter time," Fisher

said. "We end up feeding those workers who don't return to Mexico in the off months, yet can't make it financially during months when there's no work. Rents don't drop around here in the winter, either, which makes it twice as hard for them. We do a lot to help them survive those rough times, and need to have the community support us in doing that."

Aside from serving hot lunches, Loaves & Fishes provides families with bags of groceries, special food and toy baskets during the holidays and emergency food services to people all around the Santa Cruz County. It also offers a rewarding environment for volunteers.

"Our volunteer program is one that I'd really like to build up," Fisher said. "It's even a great place for people who may have gotten into trouble with the law and need to do some community service. When they come here, not only do they get good food, but they're really making a difference in other people's lives. They also get to interact with some amazing people. It can be quite a sobering experience."

Loaves & Fishes has also developed a partnership with the National Council on Aging by offering local elderly residents like Eiko Nishihara a meaningful place to volunteer their time.

"You get to meet all kinds of people working here," Nishihara said. "I never realized how many people need food in our community before I this. They're really helping people here."

Loaves & Fishes also provides a critical link between the Second Harvest Food Bank and the community, Fisher said.

"We're meeting a huge need out of this little house," he added as he pointed to a row of men, women and children contentedly eating lunch on a picnic table in the back yard.

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*To make tax-deductible donations, send checks to Loaves & Fishes, 150 Second St., Watsonville, CA 95076. Those interested in volunteer opportunities or receiving additional information are encouraged to contact Phil Fisher at 722-4144.*