



Curtis Barba (right), a volunteer with Victory Outreach of Santa Cruz, and Jerry Iniguez, deck/yard supervisor for Second Harvest Food Bank, load drop-site food donation barrels into a van this morning as part of the annual Holiday Food Drive for Second Harvest.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Holiday food drive kicks off

Second Harvest Food Bank rolls out the barrels

By TARMO HANNULA
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Second Harvest Food Bank charged into high gear this morning with its annual Holiday Food Drive. Area businesses joined forces to help deliver about 600 donation barrels to various drop sites around Santa Cruz County.

"We are very grateful for these companies helping like this," said Craig George, food drive and events manger for Second Harvest. "We could not do this without them."

This year's goal is 660,000 pounds of food. That means each of the food barrels would have to be filled six times each. Barrels will be stationed at all library branches, fire stations and Goodwill stores as well as at branches of Coast Commercial banks and all departments of the County of Santa Cruz. The drive largely targets Santa Cruz County,

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George said.

Overall, 120 community and business leaders will join in the holiday food drive kickoff, which was launched at 8 a.m. today. About 1,000 barrels will be distributed.

"With the economic downturn and increasing local layoffs, the Holiday Food Drive is the community's chance to make sure everyone will have a decent holiday meal," said Willy Elliot McCrea, executive director for Second Harvest. "Nearly half of this food will go to children."

More than 350 companies and organizations plan to contribute enough food and cash to help feed the hungry through the holidays and the rest of the winter in the largest food drive of the year. Major sponsors for this year's food drive include Cisco Systems, Coast Commercial Bank, Granite Construction, Nokia,

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Owner of Hodges

Moving and Storage

Plantronics and Seagate.

To help with the barrel rollout, a fleet of trucks and drivers is being volunteered by J.M. Smacker, Grey Bears, Hedges Moving and Storage, Waste Management, Laborers Union Local 270, First Alarm, Goodwill, Le-dyard and other community groups.

"I have been helping with the drive for over 12 years, said John Hodges, owner of Hodges Moving and Storage. "This is our way of helping our community out."

"We want to help people at all levels," Hodges said.

Second Harvest provides food

for 38,000 people each month, half of which are children, through a network of 120 agencies and programs. The food collected during the food drive will furnish 65,000 families with three meals. Families served commonly earn less than \$11,500 annually. Ninety percent of the people served by Second Harvest are children, seniors, disabled or the working poor.

Besides food donations, Second Harvest greatly relies on cash donations to keep the Holiday Food Drive in motion. For every dollar donated, Second Harvest says it can gather and distribute \$10 worth of food. The Food Bank must raise \$57,000 in donations every month to feed an average of 12,700 families a total of 275,000 meals. A \$4.50 donation provides each family an average of 21 meals.

The best food donations are peanut butter, canned fruit, vegetables, tuna, stews and soups, dried beans, rice and nuts and cereals.