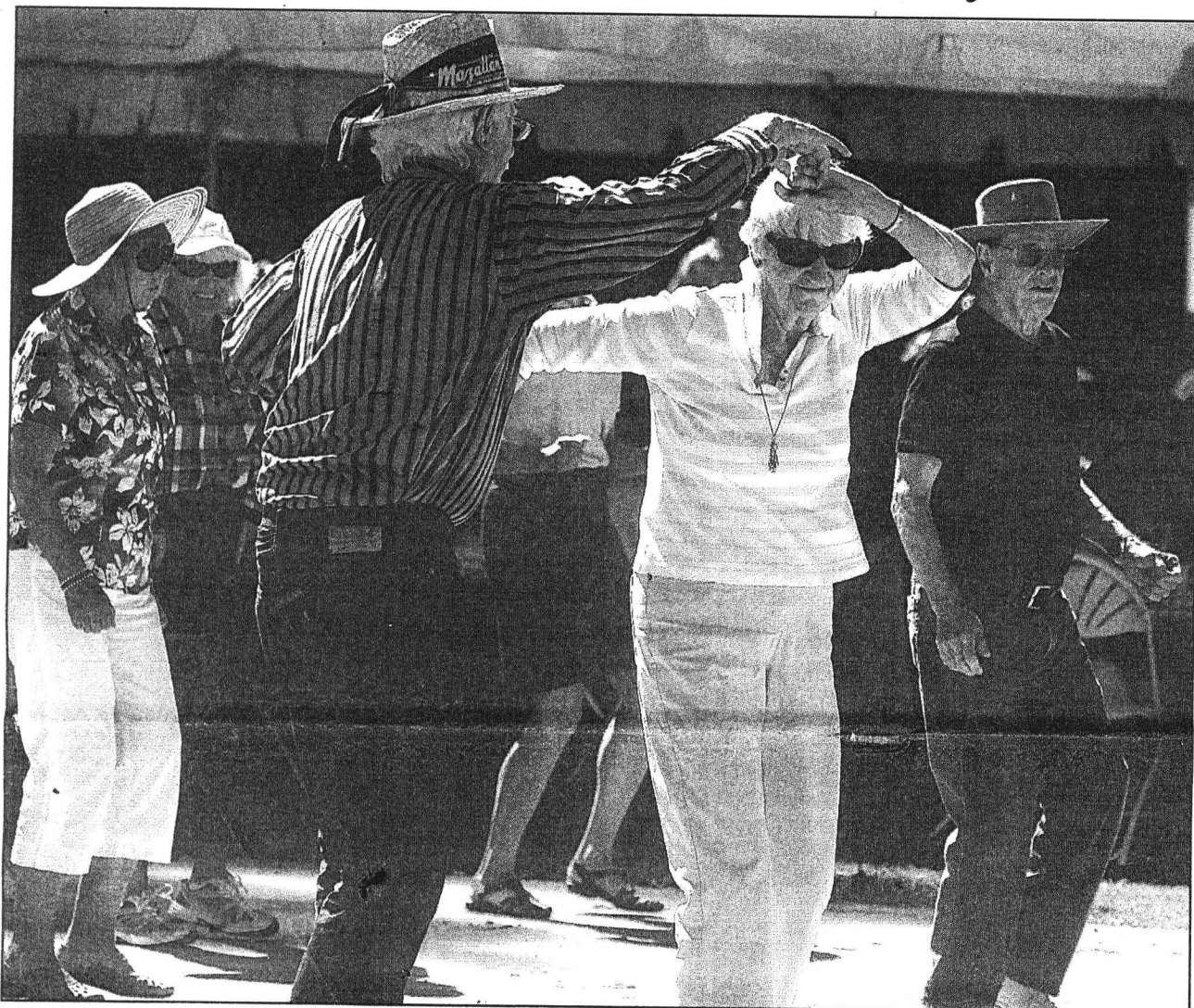


Grey Bears celebrates 40 years



Photos by Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

ABOVE: Bud Winslow (right), a senior senator for the California Senior Legislature, enjoys dancing with other seniors Tuesday in Harvey West Park at the Harvest Picnic and 40th anniversary celebration for the Grey Bears. BELOW: Anyone 55 or older was treated to a free barbecue lunch.

Group delivers groceries to 4,200 seniors every week

By TARMO HANNULA
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

SANTA CRUZ — Grey Bears of Santa Cruz County celebrated 40 years of providing nutritious food to seniors at their annual Harvest Picnic at Harvey West Park Tuesday.

About 1,500 people enjoyed the barbecue lunch that included live music, dancing, speeches by a host of dignitaries and socializing. More than 200 volunteers prepared and served the meal.

Tim Brattan, who has been executive director of Grey Bears for the past three years, said the picnic was an



enormous success.

"There was a collective sigh at the end of the day," he

said. "It was a big event and I believe every city and town in the county was represent-

ed. The food was fantastic. We got a lot of positive feedback."

Brattan said that Grey Bears was founded in 1973 by a "simple act of kindness" when Kristina Mailliard and her boyfriend, Gary Denny, began a routine of handing out fruits and vegetables from their garden to seniors in their neighborhood who were in need of healthy food. The notion took off the first year and Grey Bears swelled to 100 members. In the next year membership topped 1,000. By 2012 Grey Bears,

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which was incorporated as a nonprofit in 1976, there were 4,100 members.

"The dream that Kristina and Gary had has been realized," Brattan said. "Their observations and generosity have bloomed into a community-based, volunteer-driven organization that is thriving today. We now deliver about 2.6 million pounds of food a year."

Indeed, the Grey Bears Brown Bag program now delivers bags of fresh, nutritious

groceries to 4,200 seniors every week throughout Santa Cruz County and has grown into one of the most efficient food distribution and recycling nonprofits in the country. Over the past 40 years they have delivered 78 million pounds of fresh produce and groceries to seniors.

"It's a great organization," said Lee Horstman who has been a member for the past two and half years. "A friend talked me into joining and Grey Bears has been a wonderful group to be part of. The barbecue today was very satisfying."

Brattan said he is tremendously thankful of the farmers, many from Watsonville, that

donate fruits and vegetables on a regular basis.

"We are so blessed that so much of the food we provide is locally grown," Brattan said.

Watsonville City Council member Daniel Dodge and Mayor Lowell Hurst spoke at the event. Dodge told the gathering that his mother was a Grey Bears member and that the weekly grocery deliveries and weekly check on her were of crucial importance. Brattan said that about a third of Grey Bears members are from South County.

Helen Cordova of Watsonville said she has been donating to the Grey Bears for years, and

is currently a participant of the Brown Bag program and also enjoys the annual Thanksgiving dinner.

"They do a great job," she said. "They are just so nice. They do wonders."

Alan Kramer of Santa Cruz said he has been a member for more than 15 years, and has volunteered in several different capacities.

"When I retired I wanted something to fill the time," he said. "This gave me something to fill up my life."

Besides providing food, Grey

Bears also operates a Thrift Store, a Computer Electronics Store and a composting program. With the 70,000 pounds of food scraps that end up in their composting program, Grey Bears turns the waste into a profit by selling the compost. Technicians rebuild computers donated to the Computer Electronics Store and recycle what can't be used.

"Of the computers we can rebuild, we strip out the memory and update the hard drives," Brattan said. "Then we sell an

entire computer system of a monitor, keyboard and mouse for \$100." Membership with Grey Bears is \$20 per year.

"Through the genius of our board members, all of the people who have given money for this property and expenses, the countless volunteers we continue to operate very efficiently," Brattan said. "We have so many people that have retired and are now repurposing their lives to give back. Our staff of volunteers is fantastic."