

LOAVES AND FISHES

# Food pantry issues appeal

Food Bank  
By TRINA KLEIST  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

9-23-00

WATSONVILLE — When Loaves and Fishes moved its hot-lunch program downtown, they learned what others who provide services to the hungry and homeless already knew: the numbers of the needy are rising.

"It's scary," said Annette Baldwin, president of the board and full-time volunteer director for the program, sponsored by St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church.

Marco Cortez, 44, drifts in and out of shelters at times like this, when he has no work in construction; he's been jobless for two weeks.

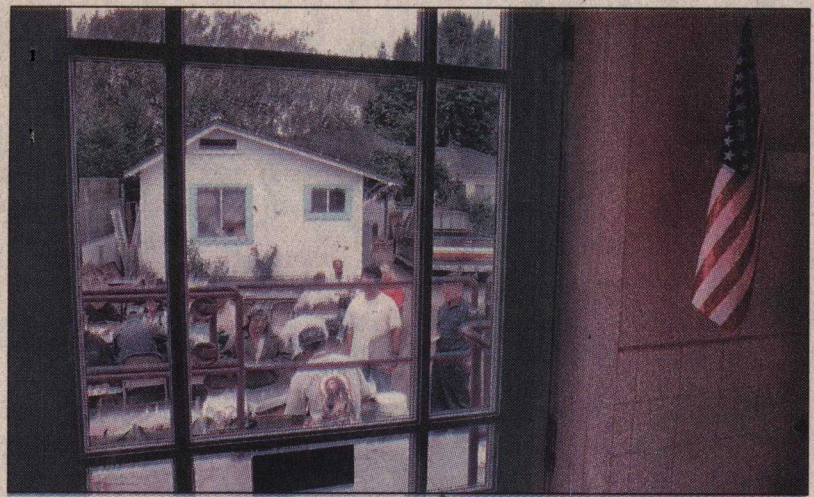
A woman who identified herself only as Kathy had landed a job after much searching, but lost it recently.

Baldwin said she is seeing more people like them, espe-

Please see **HELP** on **BACK PAGE**

**'This is the final safety net.'**

ANNETTE BALDWIN,  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Lunch is served on folding tables in the back yard of Loaves and Fishes on Second Street in Watsonville.

## Help

Continued from Page A1

cially the working poor and families.

"I'm looking for work. There's no money for rent," said Cortez, who hails from Mexicali, Mexico, but has worked in California for 20 years. "There was a time when I was doing well, but then there were (personal) problems."

Countywide, homelessness has doubled in the past 10 years, according to a 2000 United Way census of the homeless. According to the study, more than 8,500 people are homeless in the county at some time each year.

Of those, 34 percent reported some type of employment, but most said their wages were too low and local rents too high. In the South County, most of the employed homeless reported they work in agriculture.

"Some of our clients work in local mechanic and auto body shops," Baldwin said.

As many as 50 people a day come here for a hot meal, and more come for bags of dry goods that are offered through the program's food pantry. But that's about twice as many as Baldwin had expected during the summer months.

Part of that increase comes from Loaves and Fishes' move in June from St. Patrick's midtown building to a renovated Victorian on Second Street, on the fringes of the city's warehouse district and in the midst of one of its highest density housing areas.

But numbers elsewhere are rising, too.

Up to 100 people are sleeping at the Salvation Army's shelter on Union Street every night, and up to 130 on weekends, said secretary Natalie Cruz. Those numbers will grow even larg-

er as winter approaches and fields go out of production for the season.

Like Loaves and Fishes, about half of the clients at the Salvation Army shelter are farmworkers, and they are seeing more families with young children.

"It's been increasing little by little. We have about 8 percent more" than last year, Cruz said. "It's mostly because they can't afford to pay the rent."

About 30 single men are sleeping at the Pajaro Rescue Mission on Railroad Avenue, an increase of 10 to 15 percent over last year, the Rev. George Pielenze Jr. said.

"There's a spillover from Silicon Valley," Pielenze said. "The prices are going higher for rent, and the job market isn't staying with it unless you're skilled. ... It's a pretty limited job market for your untrained people."

Pielenze has also seen an increase in families coming to the mission's food pantry program. It currently serves about 30 families, and twice that in winter. Most are farmworkers.

"It seems like there are fewer single guys and more families," Pielenze said.

Baldwin said she doesn't know why there's been an increase, but expects more hungry people as winter approaches. She is looking for help from new board directors — there are currently four vacancies on the 13-member board — and from donors who can help pay off the \$90,000 mortgage on their new facility.

"We want to focus on our mission, which is to feed the hungry and the homeless and to improve our services," Baldwin said. "This is the final safety net."

Contact Trina Kleist at [tkleist@santa-cruz.com](mailto:tkleist@santa-cruz.com).