

## Food Drive Gets Rolling

### Hollister Free Lance (California)

October 8, 2006

Food Drive Gets Rolling Wednesday, November 08, 2006 By Michael Van Cassell Hollister - Second Harvest Food Bank rolled out hundreds of empty barrels to local businesses on Friday with hopes that they will be returned brimming with food to feed the county's growing population of residents in need. With more than 500 businesses participating throughout the duration of the drive, 300 received barrels Friday, said Christine Woodard, events and public relations director for Second Harvest in Watsonville. Hunger in San Benito County is greater than ever, with 60,000 people in need of help over the Holiday season, Woodard said. The drive will take two months to complete. "It's really an opportunity for the entire community to get involved," Woodard said. The 2006 Harvest Food Drive hopes to collect the equivalent of 75,000 pounds of non-perishable food items, through both fiscal and actual food donations, Woodard said. The 2005 San Benito Harvest Food Drive collected 70,000 pounds of food, almost twice the amount collected in 2004, said Mary Anne Hughes, executive director of Community Pantry. Nob Hill Foods collected the most food overall, bringing in 9,900 pounds. Second Harvest offers several different awards, including most donations per employee, most donations overall and the "big step" award, or largest increase in donations from the previous year's drive. Eric Dietz, chief operating officer for Ridgemark Golf Course, said Ridgemark has provided several donation points in the club house and 500 bags for door-to-door collection in the 1,000-home Ridgemark community. "Our immediate goal was to have the largest increase in regards to last year's numbers," Dietz said. Ridgemark has participated every year since Dietz became the chief operating officer four years ago. Dietz said the drive is important because it brings the community together for a good cause. "We just need to do our part to be a good steward of the community," Dietz said. As housing prices have increased sharply in recent years, Woodard said more and more people are struggling to make ends meet. "As the housing costs rise there is a need as never before," Woodard said. Second Harvest collects and redistributes food to local San Benito County organizations such as the Community Pantry. The Community Pantry's partnership with Second Harvest has helped its collecting power tremendously, Hughes said. The approximately 900,000 pounds of food the Community Pantry processes each year reach only 5 percent of people living below the poverty line in San Benito, well below the 25 percent total. But San Benito has responded to the increasing need. "We

have a very generous community when they understand what the issues are," Hughes said.

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