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## Moraga Gives Nearly 9000 Pounds of Pears to the Food Bank

By Sophie Braccini



1st time volunteer Adam Nolan from Lafayette helps his mom at the pear harvest Photo Andy Scheck

The first weekend in August - swimmers gear up for championship meets, parents either reluctantly or joyously embark on back-to-school shopping trips, and volunteers in Moraga pick pears.

Continuing a tradition of community service, the Moraga Park Foundation organizes the annual pear-picking event that takes place in and around the pear orchard belonging to the Moraga School District at the corner of Camino Pablo and Canyon Road. For the last several years, volunteers have also plucked fruit from the surrounding gardens and church trees (with the permission of the owners). The Foundation is joined in the effort by volunteers from various service groups. The beneficiary of the cornucopia of fruit is the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, an organization in need of a fresh food supply for a growing number of impoverished families.

"My experience as a satellite group coordinator was very gratifying," says Foundation member Bob Reynolds, "I spent four hours helping volunteers pick pears from yards along School Street. The homeowners were great, and some had their pears picked by us before." Reynolds noticed that the pickers were a mixed group - a mother/daughter team working long and hard on behalf of the National Charity League, an older gentleman, a father with his teen-

age son, teen-age girls, and a family that included a three year old and a baby in a stroller, among many others. "They were all great, enthusiastic, and happy to be contributing," Reynolds adds, "One of the families whose yard we picked joined in the effort."

According to Sharon Zeppegno, of the Contra Costa and Solano Food Bank, Moraga is the only community that organizes such a collection. "This may be due to the fact that Moraga was such a large pear producer and that trees have been kept productive by being consistently pruned," she says, "and this is the only town that makes it a real community project and celebration."

Some of the Moraga trees are 70 to 80 years old, and those located on school district property are pruned every year by Foundation volunteers.

This year's picking resulted in 8968 pounds of boxed pears, according to the Food Bank; by August 12th it had all been given away. "We serve 132,000 people (89,000 in Contra Costa)," says Zeppegno, "Most of the pears were distributed in the grocery bags that people in need receive once a week, at a designated place and time. The remaining fruit was channeled toward our soup kitchens and other meal services."

The Food Bank particularly appreciates the Moraga donation that's made every summer. "We always run low on our supplies during the end of summer," explains Zeppegno, "people do not think of summer as a time of need, but most schools do not have a summer program and kids who receive food there are not helped during these vacation months." Additionally, some donation barrels that are located in schools are not active in summer.

At this time the Food Bank needs non-perishable items for children and families such as enriched cereals, tuna, peanut butter, canned fruits and vegetables, all of which are easy to stock. There are donation barrels in such places as the Moraga Starbucks, the post offices, the Lafayette CVS, and the Orinda Community Church (a complete list of donation centers is available at www.foodbankccs.org/docs-pdfs/OngoingFDList.pdf).

"Unfortunately, the number of people who need us has increased by 46% over the last four years," says Zeppegno, "we see a lot of newcomers in our distribution centers that are educated people, unable to find work." For more information about locations or how to hold a food drive, go to: www.foodbankccs.org.

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