

# Mountain View VOICE

June 21, 2019



MAGALI GAUTHIER

**Jesse Nattamai** and daughter **Leena, 6**, sit down to eat at Rengstorff Park on June 18 after picking up lunches from Mountain View Whisman School District's Seamless Summer program. Thanks to a grant from the county, free meals are offered to seniors as well as children this summer.

## New food truck aims to bring summer meals to hungry families

*By Kevin Forestieri*

**R**olling into the Theuerkauf Elementary School parking lot with a big serving of fanfare last week, Mountain View Whisman School District's new food

truck is promising to bring meals to thousands of children at risk of going hungry this summer.

Equipped with lights and decorated with colorful images of fruits and vegetables, the eye-catching food truck is the

cornerstone of an ambitious plan to serve 100,000 meals to needy children this summer. The hope is that bringing meals to the kids — rather than the other way around — could be a

*(cont. next page)*

## FOOD TRUCK

Harvest Food Bank.

Santa Clara County pitched in \$344,000 toward buying and staffing the food truck, while the cooks and the meals are paid for by the school district. Standing with the truck during a media event on June 14, county Supervisor Joe Simitian said that every additional meal served using the truck will have far-reaching benefits, as children with consistent access to meals do better in school and lead more successful lives. It's not easy to prove those meals were a direct factor, he conceded, but everyone who helped launch the food truck program should walk away knowing the role they've played.

"It may be a little hard to connect the dots ... but the connection there is very real," Simitian said.

The Mountain View Whisman School District has spent years trying to bring up its summer meal count through its Seamless Summer Program, and reports solid results so far. Under Debbie Austin, the district's food services director, the summer program went from serving 15,000 meals to 60,000 in just three years, hitting its goal even while Rengstorff Park's facilities were under construction.

Although the district had already been delivering packaged meals at popular locations like Rengstorff Park, Austin said the food truck is still a game-changer. It enables the chefs to prepare, transport, re-heat and serve meals

outside of the district's centralized kitchen. The truck keeps hot food hot and the cold food cold, Austin said, which helps the district meet all the legal requirements to serve more meals.

Plus, she said, there's a special kind of allure that she believes will attract more families than ever.

"When you've got a food truck, people come," she said. Despite the June 14 event being billed as a ribbon-cutting of sorts, the food truck isn't actually quiet ready to deliver meals yet. School district staff told the *Voice* on the Tuesday after the event that the truck is currently stuck in the Crittenden Middle School parking lot awaiting a permit to serve meals, which is expected to be granted in one to two weeks.

While the Seamless Summer Program is ostensibly intended to serve district students, children aren't asked questions and are served meals regardless of where they attend school. Adults can purchase meals for a fee, and free meals will be available to seniors at the Rengstorff Park site.

A big component of summer lunch participation is simply getting the word out. Leslie Bacho, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank, told the *Voice* at the June 14 event that her organization works to identify high-needs neighborhoods and let them know food is available, relying on banners, bus ads and door hangers.

"A lot of people don't know

these summer meals are available," she said.

Bacho said Mountain View Whisman is the only district in the county she is aware of to try using a food truck to reach more families during the summer months.

When asked what's on the menu, Austin said it's going to change month to month depending on what's in season. Right now, kids can expect to see plenty of peaches, nectarines, canta-loupe, tomatoes and three types of lettuce. Food prep is being handled by two chefs hired by the district, one of whom worked as a head chef in a restaurant for 14 years.

Back when the food truck was first making its way through the county's budget process, two members of Stanford's Pediatric Advocacy Program penned a letter praising the school district's ongoing efforts to reach more children with its summer food program. Mountain View's income disparities are immense and reaching the "pockets" of poverty throughout the city is particularly challenging when trying to raise meal program participation, according to the letter.

Austin's mobile meal program is "one of the most innovative summer meal programs around," according to the letter, saying it was breaking down barriers to access that include transportation and immigration status.

"We believe that a mobile food truck will increase the district's ability to reach some of the hard-est-to-reach children and families this summer, a time when child hunger peaks," the letter said. "The food truck will allow the district's staff to add additional meal program sites, targeting families living in subsidized housing complexes, mobile home parks, RV communities and those frequenting other community sites."

Below are the list of current stops for the food truck, though the route may be modified to add new stops, including busy apartment complexes full of families with kids.

*Email Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mv-voice.com*

### Theuerkauf School

June 14-July 12, closed July 4, 5  
1625 San Luis Ave.,  
Mountain View  
Breakfast, 7:30-8:30 a.m.  
Lunch, 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

### Castro Park

June 17-Aug. 2, closed July 4, 5  
1795 Latham St., Mountain View  
Lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

### Rengstorff Park

June 17-Aug. 2, closed July 4, 5  
201 South Rengstorff Ave.,  
Mountain View  
Lunch, noon-1:30 p.m. Senior meals available for free.

# Los Altos Town Crier

Community news for Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and Mountain View since 1947

June 29, 2022

## Mountain View Whisman School District offers free summer meals to kids

Town Crier Report

The Mountain View Whisman School District, in partnership with Santa Clara County and Second Harvest Food Bank, is providing free meals to children in need while school is out of session at three sites in Mountain View throughout the summer.

One site also provides free meals to adults in need of a nutritious meal.

“Food insecurity doesn’t go away just because it’s summer vacation,” County Supervisor Joe Simitian said. “Mountain View Whisman not only feeds students during the school year, they’re currently bringing meals to all kids in the community, and even some older folks, who have challenges accessing food.”

Summer hunger is a nationwide problem that affects up to 22 million children annually. Lack of access to food can cause serious health concerns, including development-

tal delays, chronic illness and poor mental health, according to Feeding America, an organization that provides equitable access to food across the country.

Locations and hours of the food trucks follow.

### **Rengstorff Park, 201 S. Rengstorff Ave.**

Open 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. weekdays through July 29 (except July 4). Meals are available to both children and adults.

### **Castro Elementary School, 500 Toft St.**

Open 7:30-8:30 a.m. (breakfast) and 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. (lunch) weekdays through July 29 (except July 4). Meals are available to children.

### **Mistral Elementary School, 505 Escuela Ave.**

Open 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. weekdays July 11-29. Meals are available to children.



COURTESY OF JOE SIMITIAN

Mountain View Whisman School District chef Dalton Mendoza, from left, MVWSD director of child nutrition Debbie Austin and County Supervisor Joe Simitian support the district’s summer meal distribution site at Rengstorff Park earlier this month.