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DISTRICT RESPONDS TO 'TOUGH TIMES'

REDWOOD CITY — In a move it has never tried before, the Sequoia Healthcare District has issued a call for grant requests in the category “Staying Healthy in Tough Economic Times” — and is getting a strong response.

National and international media have been full of news about the subprime crisis, frozen credit and recession, which is now going into its second year.

Sequoia Healthcare District grant makers are discovering the human cost of those phenomena.

“Economic problems are so vast,” said Sequoia Healthcare District Board Member Don Horsley, “they are having impacts on residents of San Mateo County. We are trying to bridge at least some of the gaps

“We are trying to make sure we are providing a safety net for people that are in economic distress, to keep them healthy and have what they need to keep healthy,” he added.

The district will grant up to \$1.2 million this year to a number of community nonprofits through a structured, lengthy application and qualification process. Horsley is the board’s designated representative responsible for the grant making process.

For the first time, a grant category recognizing special stresses of a depressed economy has been added.

One of those responding for the first time with an application in this category is St. Anthony’s Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park.

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Padua Dining Room is open from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. every day but Sunday and has served hot, nutritious meals since 1974 to anyone who lines up.

Padua Dining Room volunteer fundraiser Bob Dehn said, “What we’ve noticed in the last year is an increase in the number of people who come. We serve somewhere around 500 meals, but now we’re getting closer to 600 meals a day. This last year we served over 160,000 separate meals, and we are seeing an increase so far of about 6 percent. We anticipate at least that much of an increase in 2009.

“We have no reason to believe the demand will go down,” Dehn added.

“At the same time, donations from companies or grocery stores or people who have foodstuffs to donate appears to be dropping off a little bit. At the same time, the dining room is completely dependent on donations.

“Maybe people are looking at inventories a little harder. We didn’t get nearly as many turkeys at Thanksgiving as we did before.

“In 2007 over the whole holiday season we got over 3,000 turkeys. This year it was a little over 2,000.

“That,” Dehn concluded, “is basically the story. Demand is going up and our donations are going down. The district is recognizing the tough times, and the timing is just so right because the need is there.”

Horsley also noted that the district board directly responded to Shelter Network with a \$2,500 emergency grant because that agency saw a sudden influx of 137 homeless at its shelter.

Horsley, the retired Sheriff of San Mateo County, recalled that, “when I was sheriff, I knew the living conditions people were having to suffer with in places like Fair Oaks and other areas of the county. We are putting that experience to work in evaluating the needs of service providers and the community at large.

“It’s not just poor who are being squeezed, it’s the middle class as well. We’ve got to make these clinics and other services robust so they can handle the needs of many sectors of the community — because those are the times we live in.”

Sequoia Healthcare District’s grant application requires completed applications to be filed by Feb. 13. Grant awards will be announced for the new year in May.

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