

Published June 22nd, 2022

CP brings life to Senior Community Center in Oakland

Submitted by Cathy Chang



Families cook and serve lunch at St Mary's Center in Oakland on May 22. Photo provided

The Camino Pablo Elementary School PTA Community Services Committee on May 22 was joined by six families and 16 volunteers to cook and serve lunch at St Mary's Center in Oakland. St Mary's Center is a volunteer-led community center dedicated to improve the well-being of seniors and preschool families in West Oakland by meeting basic needs for food, housing and social connection. Seniors would come to the community center for a meal and a game of dominoes. Through participating in the center's social and nutritional programs, seniors improve their physical and mental health.

Although the center opens Monday through Friday during the week, it is open on Sundays to serve lunch and dinner to make sure that seniors in the low-income community will not go hungry on weekends. Camino Pablo Elementary School's volunteers brought fresh produce to the center and prepared 35 lunch boxes in the center's industrial kitchen. The team of 16 worked

seamlessly at each kitchen station, cooking egg rolls, marinating and frying Taiwanese chicken cutlets, sautéing mixed vegetables, making refreshing lemonade with lemons from a volunteer's backyard, baking cupcakes and interacting with the seniors during the service.

The seniors were smiling from ear to ear and chatting with volunteers to learn about the school and today's lunch menu. The center's Volunteer Coordinator, Beverly Hop, said, "The seniors loved all the effort you put into making their time with your group so enjoyable. They loved the food, the cupcakes and the poster. Camino Pablo Rocks! Your group brought the center to life!" Many seniors asked for seconds and thirds during the lunch service.

After making sure that all the seniors and the center's staff were served, the volunteers sat down to enjoy lunch with the seniors. "The service project is a wonderful way to get kids involved in helping the community while having a fun family bonding experience," said the Almeida family. The group is consisted of students from K-fifth grade. A seventh-grade middle school student, Brian Harrison, from local Joaquin Moraga Intermediate also joined his fifth-grade sibling to serve.

Camino Pablo Elementary School used to serve meals at St Mary's Center at least twice a year until the center was closed due to the pandemic. The PTA's Community Services Committee was excited to sign up and bring students and families back to the center to serve the seniors as soon as the center was reopen for Sunday lunch in April 2022. The seniors look forward to more happy visits from Camino Pablo families.

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