

# Marin Independent Journal

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## PANDEMIC

### Nonprofits get \$1.5M to aid in response

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The Marin Community Foundation dispensed \$1.5 million in emergency grants this week to 20 nonprofit organizations in an effort to bolster the response to the coronavirus health emergency.

"In most cases, the money will be deposited electronically so it will be in their accounts tomorrow morning," Thomas Peters, chief executive of the foundation, said Thursday.

Marin saw another jump in coronavirus infections on Friday as new positive tests were reported, bringing the county's total case count to 38.

Four people with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Marin have been hospitalized. There have been no deaths associated with the illness in the county.

Peters said there is no telling

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## Nonprofits

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how long it might take for state and federal government initiatives to provide critical financial assistance.

"Right now this is when people's lives have been upended," Peters said, "so we're giving these organizations this assistance with no strings attached other than it be for them to use their best judgment to address urgent food and other emergency shelter issues."

Peters said the grants will be in addition to the \$500,000 in funds for coronavirus response the foundation has pledged if Marin County agrees to provide matching funds. Katie Rice, president of the Marin County Board of Supervisors, has indicated the board is likely to approve the request at its meeting Tuesday.

The Marin Community Foundation has also created another coronavirus response fund to collect donations from private donors.

"Money is already coming into that," Peters said. "The generosity that is being generated is just incredible. We'll be distributing from that over the next few days."

In addition to managing the Buck Trust, the proceeds from which are spent exclusively on Marin County projects, the foundation oversees private "do-

nor-advised" funds. The \$1.5 million in emergency funds consists of both Buck Trust and private donor fund contributions.

About 10 of the organizations will be receiving grants of \$100,000. Peters said the other 10 will receive grants ranging from \$30,000 to \$75,000.

"Fortunately Marin Community Foundation is one of those funders that gets out in front of problems as much as possible," said Paul Ash, executive director of the SF-Marin Food Bank, one of the organizations receiving a \$100,000 grant.

Ash said because so many people are losing their jobs due to the health emergency there is an increasing need for food assistance. That means increased food, trucking and staff overtime costs for the food bank.

Ash said the food bank also has had to rethink its distribution network.

"We rely a lot on trying to meet seniors where they are," he said. "A month ago they were in senior centers getting a congregant meal. Now those places are closed."

Whistlestop, the San Rafael-based organization that provides rides and meals to seniors and the disabled, is also receiving a \$100,000 grant.

Nancy Geisse, Whistlestop's chief operations officer, said her organization is trying to respond to an increased demand for food delivery services while cop-

ing with lost revenue due to fewer seniors visiting its Jackson Cafe and using its ride service.

"We've had over a 70% reduction in our ride volume," Geisse said.

The Jackson Cafe has gone from serving 80 to 90 meals a day to just four meals on Friday. The organization is also having to cope with the fact that well over 60% of its food delivery volunteers are over the age of 65 and are suddenly unavailable.

Geisse said Whistlestop is using its paid drivers to fill in as much as possible but that increases costs. She said her organization is looking at the possibility of delivering to an additional 100 people as part of Whistlestop's Nourish meal delivery service to people with chronic or life-threatening illnesses.

Geisse said Whistlestop could cut its losses by laying off some of its drivers.

"But we don't want to do that," she said. "We have drivers who are ready and willing to work. We have a fleet of 100 vehicles. We should put them to work."

Canal Alliance, which serves San Rafael's predominantly low-income, Latino community, is another nonprofit receiving \$100,000 from the Marin Community Foundation.

Omar Carrera, executive director of Canal Alliance, said his organization is being deluged with requests for financial assistance.

"The coronavirus layoffs

are causing a huge economic impact on the community that we serve," Carrera said. "Today we have close to 30 applications for financial assistance just through the door. I don't know how many online."

Carrera said Canal residents were feeling the effects of the health emergency on the jobs long before the stay-home order was issued in Marin and other counties on Monday. Carrera said he created a relief fund and had collected \$90,000 in donations before receiving the Marin Community Foundation grant.

But Carrera said even donations of this size won't meet the needs of Canal residents who have lost their jobs and have no money to pay rent or buy food.

Canal Alliance has identified 200 people in the community who need food delivered to them. That is hard to accomplish, however, since many of the organization's volunteers are at high risk due to their advanced age.

Loss of volunteers due to age is a common denominator among Marin nonprofits. Homeward Bound, which operates the county's homeless shelters and is also receiving \$100,000 from the Marin Community Foundation, is no exception.

"At our Mill Street Center, we had congregations that had provided the evening meal every night for the past 30-plus years," said Paul Fordham, Home-

ward Bound's deputy executive director. "But right now we're stopping volunteers from coming in and bringing food on site."

Instead, the food is being prepared at Homeward Bound's Culinary Academy in Novato and delivered to the Mill Street Center, which is in San Rafael. Homeward Bound is also providing lunch at Mill Street during this time so people don't have to venture out.

Eighty people are housed at Homeward Bound's New Beginnings facility in Novato. People there live in a four-person bedroom with a shared bathroom and dining. At Mill Street, where some people sleep in bunk beds, residents are being asked to sleep head-to-toe.

Both facilities are full and there is no capacity to absorb more people should people lose their housing due to the economic disruption.

In addition to extra food and staff costs due to the loss of volunteers, Homeward Bound is spending more on cleaning supplies. Both shelters are being cleaned three or four times daily, and residents are being given sanitizing solution as well.

"One of the great things about this funding from MCF," Fordham said, "is that it allows us to make the right decisions that are in the interests of the clients and staff and not have to think about it."