



Marin Couple Feeds Seniors in Need For Free Jefferson Award Winners: Ruth Schwartz & Curt Kinkead



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Curt Kinkead and his wife Ruth Schwartz say they've discovered a secret to giving:

"If you want to be loved by a bunch of people, just bring them food when they need it, and they will really love you," Curt says with a laugh.

He and Ruth pick up surplus food that stores would otherwise trash. Each week, they give the groceries away to 2000 Marin County seniors and others who are cash-strapped. Their program is called "Respecting Our Elders."

"Our goal is to feed everyone in Marin County who wants free food," Curt explains. "And we're succeeding. And it isn't costing taxpayers a cent. Not a cent!"

Today, Respecting Our Elders distributes more than \$4,000,000 of mostly perishable food a year.

Curt and Ruth create a sense of community among some otherwise-isolated senior citizens as they drop off food at Parnow Friendship House in San Rafael. The couple says its all-volunteer nonprofit serves 20 senior housing complexes, churches, and other community groups at a cost of 20 cents a person a week.

They founded Respecting Our Elders in 2005, after discovering a neighbor in their subsidized housing complex was going hungry.

We just saw the need and decided to fill it," Ruth remembers.

"We discovered, in retrospect, that we'd not only completely eliminated hunger, but also poverty from that complex," Curt adds.



Curt Kinkead and Ruth Schwartz
(Photo by Respecting Our Elders volunteer, Susan Miller)

"Many of the food recipients, like Lainie Press, try to squeak by on social security.

"It's a tremendous help knowing that no matter what, this is going to be here," Lainie says.

Curt picks up donated groceries seven days a week. He and Ruth get help from 100 volunteers, like Susan Miller, who says:

"They both are so much into it in their hearts. Heart and soul."

Curt's donated van racks up a thousand miles a week, and it's wearing down. So this former writer and whale-watching guide is seeking donations of newer mini-vans and cars.

"I've had a varied career. But this is the most fun thing I've ever found to do," Curt says with a smile.

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