

# Truck brings fresh food to seniors

BY CARRIE MCCLISH | CNS

**OAKLAND, CALIF.** — A new shiny truck brings food to senior citizens in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood and nearby communities.

A year in the making, the Mercy Brown Bag Program's truck visits several locales and offers assistance to seniors faced with the high cost of rent and medication.

Krista Lucchesi, director of the program that is part of the Mercy Retirement and Care Center, couldn't stop smiling as she looked at the vehicle parked behind the residential care facility.

Having the truck "now is kind of amazing for all of us," she told *The Catholic Voice*, newspaper of the Oakland Diocese.

Staff and volunteers cheered as the truck arrived April 2 after a cross-country trip from St. Louis, where it was built. Nicole St. Lawrence, Mercy Brown Bag's assistant director, brought it west on a mission to help stem the tide of senior hunger in Alameda County.

Most recipients enrolled in Mercy Brown Bag have an average yearly income of less than \$12,000, in a county where the annual median income is \$82,000. Aver-



CNS PHOTO | CARRIE MCCLISH, CATHOLIC VOICE

**Krista Lucchesi stands outside the new Mercy Brown Bag food truck at Oakland's Mercy Retirement and Care Center in California.**

age rent for a one-bedroom apartment is about \$1,663, Lucchesi said. Many seniors must make choices about buying food, medication or shelter in order to survive.

"Healthy food is usually the first thing they will give up," Lucchesi said.

That's where Mercy Brown Bag comes in. The program delivers food to 5,000 seniors at 17 sites and through 45 social service providers. Most of the food comes from the Alameda County Community Food Bank.

Each registered person can take home up to 20 pounds of groceries. Much of the food from a variety of food groups can be considered senior-appropriate: low in sodium and easy to chew.

Contacts at distribution sites show which foods are more desired or popular.

"Some sites say to bring rice every single time and say, 'We are always going to want rice' or 'We love sweet potatoes,'" Lucchesi said.

"Whenever we can find them, we try to make sure we have certain foods available for that site."

Fresh produce makes up the majority of the food. The truck is equipped with a system that will lower baskets of produce to street level, making selection easier. The truck also has a refrigerated area, allowing transport of milk and other products that must be chilled.

The truck, which cost \$200,000, was paid for

with donations from the Thomas J. Long Foundation and the Carl Gellert and Celia Berta Gellert Foundation. It allows the program to reach up to 3,000 more seniors, Lucchesi said.

"We are currently building our route to see which areas are not as well served," she added.

The truck also will help address new challenges.

"We kept getting calls from low-income seniors who are homebound and with little or no social support," Lucchesi said. "We used to be able to ask them, 'Do you have a child or a friend or a neighbor who can come and get your bags for you?' People had some social connections. But now the isolation is so much deeper and we are hearing more and more from people who say they have no one who can come out to pick up their bag, which makes us sad."

The truck may also help address transportation concerns.

"We have been getting calls where people are saying, 'I don't have any money to get on public transportation to get to one of your sites.' They are really, really living on the edge.," Lucchesi said.

# Music ranges from choirs to bands

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Sr. Rosaire expanded her horizons — both geographically and vocationally. In 1985, she began a four-year term at Guardian Angels School in West Point, Neb. In addition to teaching music, she served as a band teacher.

"When I started, there were 25 kids in the band, and when I left there were 100," she said with a smile. "I just kept going after students saying, 'We need you in the band!' I loved every minute of teaching the band."

In 1989, Sr. Rosaire returned to Green Bay and for nine years worked at Holy Family School, where she taught music, served as organist and oversaw a children's choir.

"Going back to my hometown was wonderful," she said, proudly adding, "My parents were still alive and they'd come to my students' performances."

As with many Green Bay natives, Sr. Rosaire is a lifelong fan of the Green Bay Packers (she said her father was in the stands at the very first Packers game).

One of her students at Holy Family was Tyler Mariucci, son of former Packers quarterback coach Steve Mariucci. One of her fondest memories is being invited to Mariucci's house for dinner and all of the quarterbacks were there, including Brett Favre, Ty Detmer and Mark Brunell.

"My favorite Packer ever is Brett Favre. He's a good ol' country boy," Sr. Rosaire said. "And I like Jordy Nelson too. He's really unselfish."

In 1998, Sr. Rosaire left her mittens and winter hat at home and began a new assignment in the Arizona desert. For 11 years, she was at Immaculate Conception in Yuma, where she gave lessons to Cuffari (whom she still calls "little Joey").

"She let everybody know she was a Packers fan," Cuffari said with a chuckle. "On the other hand, I've always been a Philadelphia Eagles fan. So we'd make candy bar bets on the football games."

While in Yuma, Sr. Rosaire also played the organ during Sunday Masses at the U.S. Army's Yuma Proving Ground, and led religious education classes for children after Mass.

"I met a lot of wonderful military people there," she said. "It was a fun, different experience for me. The army would explode bombs in the desert out at the proving ground. You'd hear loud booms, huge explosions. Sometimes I'd hear them when I was driving to lunch during Lent. They were pretty far away, but you could still easily hear all the bombs."

Sr. Rosaire returned to Manitowoc in 2009. "I feel great," she said. "I'm looking forward to teaching for a few more years yet."

Looking back, Sr. Rosaire said she has evolved as a music teacher.

"I'm better as a teacher now, because I have learned over the years how to better help students play with emotion and feeling," she said. "I've learned how to pull that out of them. And at the same time, I've learned that teaching is more than just a skill. You have to relate to each individual student. Those are things you learn over time."

"I just think it's a miracle that God touches certain people to do certain things. So I'm glad he touched me to do be someone who can teach music. I feel blessed to be doing this."

# They brought home souvenirs: Each other

FROM PAGE 1A

another woman, who had to cancel at the last minute. Since Blossoming Rose will not let volunteers serve alone at the site, they asked Jim, a veteran volunteer, to help. He and Pat spent three months together, working at the site.

"It was like God picked us up in two different parts of the country and put us together," Jim said. "I wouldn't have come here (to Wisconsin) from Texas, and I know she never would have come to Texas."

Pat laughs about their meeting. "The first year, I brought back pottery shards. The second year, I brought (Jim) back."

Both have found other gifts in the desert. For Jim, "there seems to be a more powerful spirit in that area. There's no way to describe it in words. It's a peaceful place, but it's very spiritual."

Pat said that "every summer, it's like God has a surprise there. You don't know who you're going to meet or what God is going to do with you while you are there."

"The first summer," she said, "I went out (walking) into the desert, until I couldn't see the buildings anymore. All of a sudden, I thought, 'I have no I.D. There are no people here, just rocks.' ... It was just me, as a being, in the wilderness, with God. That was the first big gift."

There is a very small Catholic presence in the region where they volun-



PATRICIA KASTEN | THE COMPASS

**Pat DeGroot and her husband, Jim Crumley, with their well-used Israel road map.**

teer. Pat noted that they both miss "the proximity of the church and the fellowship of a Catholic community" that they know in Green Bay.

They do attend Mass at Beersheba — about an hour's drive away — at St. Abraham Parish, which is located in a house. "No one can get a building permit for a church" Pat noted.

Membership at St. Abraham's is small and changes constantly. It is comprised of immigrants from Russia, Germany, Somalia, the Philippines and India. "Maybe 30 people, and they could be from 10 nations," Pat explained.

After Mass, they often gather for

fellowship — which may only be sharing cold water, but sometimes people bring foods from their native lands. Jim had baked rolls to bring.

This November, Pat and Jim, along with Fr. Dan Viertel as spiritual advisor, will lead a tour of Israel from Prince of Peace Parish. The group will stay a day or two at Biblical Tamar Park, in remodeled caravans that were originally donated in the 1970s for Russian immigrants. They might even take part in a simulated archaeological dig — since you need credentials to do any real archaeological work in Israel. (Jim earned them so he could to work with Tamar's archaeologists.)

The weather will be cooler in fall, with less chance of the sandstorms that batter the site in summer, requiring frequent repainting of the buildings.

Pat and Jim plan to continue volunteering at Tamar as long as they can — even though they have had to cut back a little from their original three-month stints to two-month treks.

"The big advantage is that we are still very healthy for our age and that's allowed us to do these things," Jim said. "And I think that's one of God's blessings is that we've been preserved for this time."

For more information on Biblical Tamar Park, visit [blossomingrose.org/biblical-tamar-park/](http://blossomingrose.org/biblical-tamar-park/) or email Pat DeGroot at [pat.m.degroot@gmail.com](mailto:pat.m.degroot@gmail.com)