


Lodi program serves up meals and community support

By Wes Bowers/News-Sentinel Staff Writer

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A new program aimed at providing meals to underserved youth is bringing together nonprofits, local restaurants and charitable organizations to address food insecurity while supporting small businesses.

The Lodi Community Foundation launched its Lodi Meal Program in March. The initiative allows nonprofits to request meals from a list of locally owned restaurants and distribute them to youth programs.

Executive Director Louis Ponick said nonprofits collaborate with restaurants to plan meals, while the foundation covers the cost.

“This is one example of the unique ways community foundations operate,” Ponick said. “We’ve been around 20 years, but we’re still working to increase our visibility in the community. This program goes beyond writing checks — it’s about creating partnerships with nonprofits and small businesses.”

The program has already provided more than 140 meals to students in the Bear Creek High School band, youth at the Lodi Boys & Girls Club, participants in the Junior Rascals program and members of the Lockeford Liberators Roller Derby youth team.

Boys & Girls Club Executive Director Roger Coover said about 70 children and teens received meals from El Pazcifico Mexican Grill & Cantina on March 24 during spring break.

“The kids always enjoy getting food that’s different from their school meals,” Coover said. “Our budget doesn’t typically allow us to provide restaurant meals unless they’re donated. We’ve occasionally received food from chain restaurants, but this was our first time participating through the Lodi Community Foundation.”

The Bear Creek High School band received pizza from Rick’s Pizza with support from the Lodi Community Concert Association, while Junior Rascals participants were served tortas from Super Tortas Chilangas on Lodi Avenue.

“These meals are making a real difference for Lodi’s youth and local restaurants,” said Bonnie Emerson, a board member of the Lodi Community Concert Association. “Students enjoyed a break — and the pizza — during a very full day of rehearsal and performance.”

Ponick said similar programs have been launched by other community foundations across California, often in response to homelessness or natural disasters.

While three nonprofits have partnered with local restaurants so far, several more are expected to participate this summer, particularly during youth camps, he said.

“The goal is for the program to grow over time,” Ponick said. “We want it to be sustainable. As awareness increases, we expect more nonprofits will request meals.”

To get involved as a partner or donor, visit lodicomunityfoundation.org or call the Lodi Community Foundation at 209-400-7192. More information about the program is available at tinyurl.com/LCFMealProject.