Project Open Hand client Matthew has an energy about him. You can sit down with him for more than an allotted period of time and not even know it, because you just can’t stop talking with him.

Positivity radiates from him. You can see it in his eyes. Feel it through his smile. Hear it through his voice.

Matthew is this way because he is grateful to be here. “I had a universe of friends when I first moved to San Francisco. I’m the only one left out of about 40 to 50 people.”

Matthew was born in Florida. He and his family moved around quite a bit throughout the state. After attending an all-boys Catholic high school, he went off to college and received a Bachelor of Arts in history from the University of Florida.

In 1980, Matthew moved to San Francisco, where some of his friends were already residents of the City by the Bay. He worked multiple retail jobs after he arrived, and started to make a community and life for himself.

But everything began to change during the 80s. The HIV/AIDS epidemic began to take hold, and unfortunately, friends of his were losing their lives to it. In November of 1988, Matthew decided to get tested — the results were positive for HIV.

“I remember I went to 17th Street (in San Francisco). They had a health clinic there. Back in the day, everybody had a number. I remember I had done the test, and I came in to get the results, the fellow that was volunteering and he said I was positive,” Matthew said. “I was kind of in a daze, but I didn’t freak out. I’m not one to freak out.”

He decided to take action. Along with taking the necessary medications, Matthew also signed up to receive Project Open Hand Meals the same year he was diagnosed.

“Back then the meals would come in a take-out box and it would have a sandwich, piece of fruit, and, you know, a cookie or something.”

Matthew continued to take care of himself with medication, nutrition and exercise. He then went back East for a few years before returning back to San Francisco in 2008. He signed up to receive Project Open Hand meals again, but this time the meals were more medically tailored.

“Now it’s Brussels sprouts, vegetables, pork, chicken breast, and pasta – it’s a really good balance,” Matthew said.

“If you put water in the gas tank, you’re not going to go anywhere. If you put high-tech gasoline, which is the food (Project Open Hand) gives – it only makes sense!”

“By the grace of God, a lot of people moan and groan about what they don’t have. I feel grateful for what I do have is the most important stuff. Good community. Taking care of myself. Enjoy life. I want to live to be 100 – Life is good.”

Over 25 percent of Project Open Hand clients are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. As medications and nutrition continue to help them live longer, the complex health conditions associated with aging are coming to the forefront.

You can help our clients, like Matthew, continue to thrive. Will you consider a gift today? Thank you! To give your gift online please go to openhand.org/donate.

by Marcus Tolero, Marketing and Communications Manager
Dear Friend,

As you know, it’s our mission to improve health outcomes and quality of life by providing nutritious meals to the sick and vulnerable, and caring for and educating our community.

That word, “community”, is what stands out to me, and the question I think of is: How can we better help our community?

As an organization, every decision we’ve made, from the very beginning when Ruth was cooking out of her kitchen for a small group of individuals, to the nearly 7,000 clients we now serve in the Bay Area is all about supporting our community with life-saving, nutritional services.

The people we serve come from very diverse backgrounds. They’ve experienced hardships I can never imagine. Tragedies I might never encounter, and complex health conditions that would challenge every part of my being.

No matter what they faced in the past, present, or will face in the future — we must, every part of my being. And yet, more clients depend on us than ever before. We’re seeing this as expensive. We’re seeing this as gas have become much more expensive. We’re seeing this as monthly bills, groceries and

The service can happen on an individual basis, like for HIV-client Matthew, who graces our cover with his beaming smile. Every time he comes in to visit, our weeks-

that’s why when asked, “How can you help the community?”, my answer is simply to be of service, especially to the many people living in my community.

What will your answer be? You too can be of service to your community, to a person in need, by making a gift today at openhand.org/donate. Thank you!

Paul Hepfer
Chief Executive Officer

Will You Consider a Special Gift?

As you’re seeing in your own monthly bills, groceries and gas have become much more expensive. We’re seeing this as a Special Gift?

Upcoming Events:
There’s always something cooking with events. Here’s what’s on tap: 

Hand to Hand
December 9th | Friday
Smutin Ballet
December 20th | Friday

Contact events@openhand.org for more information.

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Paul’s Letter

Being of Service

Vickie Giusti and Paul Hepfer

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Herbert Dong
VP, Finance and Information Technology

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Quarterly News from Project Open Hand | Published Since 1989

Project Open Hand
730 Polk Street
San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 447-2300

Oakland
1921 San Pablo Ave.
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 622-0221

San Francisco
720 Polk Street
San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 447-2300

Dated as of 10/05/2022

FOOD – ‘LOVE’
Vickie Giusti’s role at Project Open Hand spanned over three decades. During that time, she helped a countless number of clients in the East Bay as a caseworker – ensuring every single one of them had access to all our services and networks. But there is one specific date Vickie will always be remembered for – October 17, 1989.

It was supposed to be the grand opening of Project Open Hand in Oakland. Vickie had been preparing for this day for weeks. But the scene she witnessed was not at all what she envisioned.

A long line of pickup trucks formed outside of the West Oakland BART. Drivers were anxiously waiting for droves of volunteers wearing Project Open Hand t-shirts to come down the escalators carrying hot meals prepared for an unanticipated emergency delivery.

As soon as the trucks were loaded, drivers carefully set off to deliver meals to clients and those displaced in shelters in the East Bay, just hours after the devastation of the Loma Prieta magnitude 6.9 earthquake.

Prior to the earthquake that caused the loss of 67 lives and $5 billion in damage, Vickie met up with a friend in a hotel near San Francisco International Airport. She was ready to cheer on the San Francisco Giants against the Oakland A’s in the “Battle of the Bay” World Series.

Then the clock hit 5:04 p.m., and the broadcast cutoff.

“We were just getting ready to sit down for the ball game, and then the quake happened,” Giusti said. “The plan was to watch the game and go home, but I ended up staying at the hotel… and didn’t make it home until the next day.”

Vickie’s family and friends were unharmed and safe. The Bay Area was a different story! A part of the Bay Bridge collapsed. In West Oakland, the upper deck of the Cypress Street Viaduct of Interstate 880 fell and crushed drivers on the deck below. Smoke from fires engulfed the Marina District in San Francisco. The Bay Area was a disaster zone, but Project Open Hand was ready to answer the call for help.

Our kitchen, located back then on 17th Street in San Francisco, was one of the few commercial kitchens still operational and ready to cook meals. We quickly collaborated with the Red Cross to deliver meals to displaced families and individuals at shelters in the East Bay.

Vickie Giusti had prepared to orchestrate meal delivery to Project Open Hand clients, but now she was called on to coordinate over 50 volunteers and dozens of trucks to get the meals to clients’ homes and shelters in the East Bay.

“It was really tough. It was hard… the coordinating of it. I was out there with my husband and my baby. It was chaotic,” said Vickie.

Vickie remembers one unforgettable moment when the first volunteers began arriving around noon.

“I keep thinking about when the volunteers in Project Open Hand t-shirts came off BART with the food, and the people that met them,” she said. “It’s just amazing how people can gather together and make things happen.”

For weeks, Project Open Hand produced 15,000 meals daily and with the support of community volunteers, delivered them to clients and to those affected by the disaster on both sides of the Bay.

“I thought it was incredible that Project Open Hand stepped in right away,” Vickie said. “As one of the few industrial working kitchens in the City, they stepped right up to the plate.”

The launch might not have been what Vickie envisioned, but it laid an everlasting foundation for Project Open Hand in the East Bay.

Vickie recently retired after 33 years of providing meals with love, now spends her time swimming, dining, traveling, and cuddling her new granddaughter. But she will always be remembered by Project Open Hand and its clients for what she did on that fateful day on October 17, 1989.

by Marcus Tolono, Marketing and Communications Manager

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**Project Open Hand Plate Clubs**

Your gift makes a difference. MealTimes offers special acknowledgment to Project Open Hand supporters who have made gifts totaling $1,000 or more from April 1, 2022 through August 31, 2022. If you have questions about this list, please contact donations@openhand.org or 415-447-2300.

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*Designates members of The Supper Club, Project Open Hand’s monthly giving program.

To learn more about The Supper Club, visit: openhand.org/give/supper-club.
Classic Breakfast Omelet

Ingredients

- 2 eggs
- salt and pepper
- 1/2 tsp vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup spinach, chopped
- 1 finely diced tomato

Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, beat the eggs with a pinch each of salt and pepper.
2. Spread oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add eggs & cook, stirring & tilting the pan, until beginning to firm, 1-2 minutes. Sprinkle in the spinach and diced tomatoes.
3. Fold the eggs over the filling, let cook another minute, flip over the omelet and cook 1-2 more minutes.