

# MealTimes



Spotlight On

## The Response to COVID-19: Ruth Would Be Proud



Meals with Love + Food is Medicine



Celebrating 35 Years

# Proud



**R**uth Brinker, a San Francisco grandmother and retired food-service worker, witnessed a close friend with AIDS suffering from malnutrition during the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

At that moment, Ruth knew what needed to be done for her neighbors – provide life-saving nutrition. And that’s how Project Open Hand (POH) got started.

Fast forward 35 years. Now, on the 35th anniversary of when Ruth began cooking and delivering meals out of her kitchen, POH finds itself in another defining moment of service – responding to the needs of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the outbreak, POH was working to expand services to more people. POH continued to prepare 2,500 meals a day. Served warm and nutritious meals daily to seniors and adults with disabilities at 16 Community Nutrition Program (CNP) locations in San Francisco. Delivered meals to homebound individuals. Provided fresh and nutritious groceries out of its San Francisco and Oakland grocery centers. Drove out to the community to allow clients to shop at its mobile grocery van.

But when news and reports from health organizations began to show that the spread of COVID-19, particularly in the Bay Area, was inevitable, POH began to prepare.

“When we first started hearing about social distancing, we knew right away it would have an impact on us,” Chief Executive Officer Paul Hepfer said. “All signs pointed to the fact that we were going to have to be ready to respond to this.”

When the shelter in place order for six Bay Area counties, including San Francisco and Alameda, went into effect on March 17 followed by continued updates to the order, the impact was felt throughout all levels of the organization.

Five of the 16 CNP locations closed. The 125 daily volunteers POH depends on were reduced by 78 percent, many of whom help with kitchen prep, packaging, meal delivery, and grocery center duties.

But most importantly, the impact was felt by POH clients -- sheltered in place due to their age and/or critical health conditions and dependent on our medically-tailored nutrition.

The dire situation posed a huge challenge: **How do you provide life-saving nutrition during the middle of a pandemic?**

Deemed an essential service, POH quickly adapted its operation. CNP added 400 more meals per day to its program and allowed clients to pick up a week’s worth of frozen meals, with the exception of two sites serving to-go breakfast and

lunch meals. The grocery centers and the mobile grocery van began pre-packaging groceries for clients, which helped speed up the pickup process, and reduced time spent out of the house for at-risk clients.

Staff members from different departments and additional hires stepped in where volunteers would normally operate. POH expanded delivery capacity to clients sheltering in place, offering meals and groceries. The registered dietitians shifted all communications with clients to telephone calls and, in some cases, video conferencing.

POH also prepared for an increase in demand for its services during the coronavirus crisis. With funding from the Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS), POH acquired a temporary 40-foot freezer trailer that could store up to 20,000 meals and expanded meal service to four San Francisco Single Residence Occupancy (SRO) facilities. Medical providers also asked POH to provide medically tailored meals to COVID-19 patients released from the hospital and recovering at home.

Fortunately, since the beginning of the health crisis, POH was never alone. The community responded to its call for help. Individual donations and contributions from organizations flooded in. Personal fundraising campaigns

for POH appeared on social media platforms.

New volunteers (neighbors working from home, food industry professionals, college students, and friends and family members of POH staff and volunteers) signed up during the initial call for volunteers in March.

“We are so grateful,” State Senator Scott Wiener said during a volunteer shift. “Project Open Hand has always been there to get people the help they need.”

With no real end in sight yet to the COVID-19 pandemic, CEO Paul Hepfer believes POH is equipped for the challenges it faces now and in the future.

“It’s part of our DNA,” Hepfer said. “There’s something unique to POH that helped in our response. Maybe that’s the north star of how we were founded, but it reinforced in us that this is why we were created. And we’re not going to back away from this.”

That north star POH looks to for inspiration and strength was a grandmother and a retired-food service worker in a kitchen preparing those first meals for delivery 35 years ago.

Will you support our efforts to get healthy meals with love into the hands of those that need it most during this critical time?

Please consider an emergency gift or a monthly gift today. Thank you.

[openhand.org/donate](https://openhand.org/donate)





Paul's Letter

It's What We Do

Dear Friend,

I hope you are maintaining your physical and mental health during this difficult time.

I'd like to share with you what we at Project Open Hand have been going through the past few months as the Covid-19 crisis has hit our cities, region, state, nation, and global community. It is truly tragic – but we know our role to play as a specialized essential service provider.

Earlier in January, we were thinking about the year ahead and that this would be our 35th year of service – it would be a year to celebrate the work and the thousands we have helped. We would celebrate our progression of meals with love to include the science of meals that heal.

Ruth Brinker, our late founder, compassionately prepared meals for those in need during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This is in no way the same because of the fear, discrimination, and rejection experienced by those who suffered from HIV/AIDS, but COVID-19 has shown that those on the other side of the economic divide, the elderly, individuals in poor health with diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illnesses, need our services now more than ever.

We thought we'd be celebrating Ruth's birthday on May 1 differently, but our collective world has been upended now because of the coronavirus.

Even before Stay-at-Home orders were in place, POH diligently worked to shore

up our service volume while ensuring the safety of our clients, staff, and volunteers.

As you are well aware, our services are cost effective due in large part to the over 100 volunteers who pitch in each and every day. But with many volunteers cancelling their respective shifts and social



distancing straining our model, labor costs immediately rose as did food cost related to purchasing higher cost products that require less labor to prepare.

With more than half of our volunteers over 60, we were encouraged by younger volunteers stepping up to the call. But we know this will continue to be a challenge over the weeks and months to come.

We were asked to provide meals to some released from the hospital and recovering from COVID-19. Our clinical staff has recommended three-weeks, home-delivered meals for this now new population in need of our services.

We agreed, without funding

commitment, to take on these new cases. This is what we do.

We are developing other potential scenarios that may include adding an additional kitchen and delivery shift to double or triple our production, if needed.

We have already procured a 40-foot freezer trailer to store up to 20,000 additional meals.

We are proud to be part, as we have for 35 years, of the system that takes care of community members who are ill and vulnerable.

The situation is ever-changing and we are adapting as quickly as we can. We will work to update you with our communications.

We are so grateful for your gifts, donations, and support that allows us to increase our capacity in this time of unprecedented need.

If there is any additional help you can provide, it would be most appreciated.

Please consider a donation at [openhand.org/donate](https://openhand.org/donate).

Thank you again!

*Paul Hepfer*

Paul Hepfer  
Chief Executive Officer



Our New Board Chair and Board Members



(From Left to Right) Congratulations to our new Board Chair Mike Henry (Google), Board Member Andrea Wilkinson (Zogenix), Board Member Ginny McSwine (Salesforce), Board Member Helene York (ISS Guckenheimer), and Board Member Vishwa Chandra (McKinsey & Co.). We are excited to add their leadership and skills to an already talented group of board of directors.

Quarterly News from Project Open Hand | Published Since 1989



Project Open Hand

*Project Open Hand's mission is to improve health outcomes and quality of life by providing nutritious meals to the sick and vulnerable, caring for and educating our community.*

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Community

Volunteer Spotlight: You

Thank you to our healthy and able volunteers who answered our call for help during the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Without your dedication and support, the work we do would not be possible. We appreciate each and every one of you.



Senator Wiener Lends a Hand

On April 14th, California State Senator Scott Wiener volunteered at Project Open Hand in San Francisco to support our efforts to provide critical nutrition to the community during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Senator Wiener spent his time preparing nutritious to-go meals that were given to seniors and adults with disabilities at our Community Nutrition space located in our headquarters on 730 Polk Street.

"We have a lot of people who are food insecure and who have health problems. Project Open Hand plays such a critical role in making sure that people who need healthy food have that nutritious food and can stay healthy, particularly, during COVID-19," Senator Wiener said.

"The government can't do it alone. We need our non-profit partners to really make sure people get the help they need."



"It feels like something important to do. I'm glad to help and I hope that it makes a difference."

- Rachel Smith, San Francisco

"I want to help as much as I can, to increase their well-being and to be healthy."

- Su Phyo, San Francisco



"I'm healthy and I feel like this this is a place where i can really contritbute. People need to eat, especially in times of crisis."

- Liz Velarde, San Francisco

"This is a time of crisis, and my goal to go to nursing school has fueled my passion for humanity. This is a perfect place to do that right now."

- Michelle Quong, San Francisco



"During my days off I want my help my community and other people in need to distribute healthy food."

- Mary Llaguno , San Francisco

"I have more time and I rather spend it and donate what I can do hopefully in a helpful way."

- Booker Riley, Oakland



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 during the previous quarter (Oct. 1, 2019 through Dec. 31, 2019). 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](https://openhand.org/give/supper-club).





# Project Open Hand Plate Clubs

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From Our Kitchen to Yours

Ingredients

- 1 (3 lb.) spaghetti squash
- 2 teaspoons toasted Sesame Oil
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1/2 medium yellow or red onions, julienne
- 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup zucchini, julienne
- 4.5 ounce Plenty Velvet Spice Salad mix
- 1/2 cup carrots, julienne
- 4 eggs, scrambled
- 1/4 cup roasted nuts - cashews, peanuts or almonds

Instructions

**Step 1.** Heat oven to 375°; **Step 2.** Rinse and dry the squash. Pierce skin of spaghetti squash in several places with a paring knife. **Step 3.** Place squash in a baking dish or sheet; bake for 60 minutes. Turn over halfway through the cooking time. It's done when there is slight browning of the skin and the squash gives slightly when squeezed. **Step 4.** Cut the squash in half lenghwise through the middle, NOT from top to bottom. **Step 5.** Remove seeds and membrane from the center of the squash. **Step 6.**With a fork, gently remove the strands from inside of the squash, trying not to break up any of the noodles. Continue removing the strands until you have reached the solid outer edge. The outer edge (not the skin) is edible. While the spaghetti squash is cooking, whisk together the dressing ingredients. Set aside. Heat a large skillet over medium-low heat and toast sesame seeds for about 2 minutes

- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- Sesame-Ginger Dressing*
- 2 tablespoon rice vinegar or lemon juice
- 1 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 4 tablespoons tahini (sesame paste), optional
- 4 tablespoons light soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons ginger, peeled and minced
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/4 cup chopped scallions
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

or until golden. Remove from skillet and set aside. **To stir-fry vegetables:** Heat a large skillet over high heat and add oil. When oil is hot, add onions and stir until soft. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute or until fragrant. Add zucchini and sauté for 1 minute. Add salad mix and carrots and stir only until greens are wilted. Drizzle some dressing over vegetables to coat. Adjust seasoning to taste. Lower heat to medium. Move everything in the skillet out to the sides and pour eggs in the center. As eggs begin to set, gently pull the eggs across the pan with a spatula. Continue pulling, lifting and folding eggs until thickened. When spaghetti squash strands are ready, sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds and sesame oil over hot noodles and toss gently to coat. Fold in vegetable mixture gently to combine. Top with chopped cilantro and nuts. Serve hot with lemon or lime wedge.



Spaghetti Squash Sesame



Monthly Gifts Make a Difference



Your monthly gifts help alleviate the increased costs we are facing and ensure that we continue to get nutritious meals in the hands of those who need it most.

When you join The Supper Club, Project Open Hand's monthly giving group, you get VIP perks to POH signature events, special invitations to members-only activities, and exclusive insider access. Join the Supper Club today! Thank You.

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