



# Rice *plus* Project

Volunteers dedicated to helping Monterey-Santa Cruz County families in need

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## The Juice of Life— A Newcomer's Perspective

Lonni Trykowski

How often do you walk into a room bustling with strangers, and without introduction or fanfare, get put to work?

“Here. Pull these bags apart and open them up so they’ll be ready when the rice comes.”

This is how my passion for Rice *Plus* Project begins.

I find a seat in the crowded room where sheets cover the floor, and I begin, following the example of those next to me. Conversations swirl around me, bright and inviting as this living room. Within minutes I am no longer a stranger. I am now part of the “rice bagging” program. On the first Sunday of every month, the home of Sandhya and Ramesh Kolar overflows with 30 to 50 volunteers, united by a desire and commitment to make a difference. They divide about 3000 pounds of bulk rice, and a few hundred pounds of beans, into smaller bags that are then distributed to people who need help feeding their families, right here in our community.

“The rice is here! We need people to unload!” From out of nowhere it seems, a human chain forms from a truck out on the street, down the front walkway into the house. Hundreds of 25-pound bags of rice and beans are hoisted from arm to arm, opened, and passed around the room. Some of us pair up and begin filling the small bags with our scoops, while others tie them closed and refill emptied large bags with full smaller ones.

“We need more rice over here!” With barely room to walk, someone threads a path and drops a full bag of rice next to a pair of baggers, and picks up their finished small bags. Meanwhile someone else keeps us supplied with twist ties. The pace is fast and relentless, but the atmosphere feels like a family reunion where everyone, newcomers and old hands alike, are welcomed and appreciated. We may be handling dry rice and beans, but the juices are flowing; the enthusiasm is palpable.

Looking up from my task for a moment, the scene is astonishing— “organized chaos” as one volunteer puts it. Everyone is doing some part of the big picture. People of all ages, from diverse backgrounds, religions, and walks of life are gathered for a common mission. One wall of the room is stacked with full rice bags that still need to be divided. It looks like a daunting, all-day job to me. But just over an hour later, I’m amazed to see that the stack of rice and beans is gone. Waiting trucks and minivans out front now hold the results of our efforts. The drivers know exactly where to deliver these goods.

As I leave, I overhear a woman telling her friend why she prefers to volunteer with Rice *Plus* Project over other charitable organizations.

“I know that my hands have actually touched this rice that’s going to feed someone who needs it.”

I know how she feels. Who wouldn’t want that kind of juice in their life? It keeps me coming back every month.

Strangers become friends.

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### THANKYOU WHOLE FOODS

150 Loaves Bread

100 Canned Vegetables

110 Boxes Cereal

160 Lbs Bananas

25 Boxes Cookies, Chips, Soy  
Drinks and Juices

### NATIVIDAD MOTHER INFANT UNIT DELIVERY

70 Baby Hats

19 Fleece Blankets

25 Flannel Receiving Blankets

### FEBRUARY SHARING

46+ Volunteers came

3000 lbs Rice

375 lbs Beans

13 Cases Tomato Sauce

6 Cases Garbanzo Beans

2100 Corn Tortillas

20 Jars Peanut Butter

9 lbs Almonds

96 oz Raisins

6 Cases Corn

320 Canned Vegetables

480 String Cheese

48 oz Apricots