

La Manzana children's lunch program gives a nutritional boost to summer: Thousands of meals served

By DONNA JONES

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WATSONVILLE - Callaghan Park Cultural Center swelled with a lunch crowd Wednesday.

About 60 children crowded the long tables, chomping down on mini-cheeseburgers and green salad and sipping milk through straws stuck in small cartons.

It was a scene that's been repeated weekdays since mid-June at Callaghan and six other sites in the city and four in North County.

"Food is in when school is out," said Gabriela Lopez Chavez, quoting the motto of the summer lunch program run by La Manzana Community Resources. "The point is to supplement that meal that might be missed during the summer break."

Chavez, assistant program director at La Manzana, said during the school year, low-income children are assured of a meal on campus through federal school lunch programs. In the Pajaro Valley, more than 70 percent of students are eligible for the free or reduced-cost lunch at schools. Without the summer program to pick up where school ends, a nutritious midday meal might not be available for many of them, she said.

The program will end Friday, but during the past eight weeks 9,000 meals have been served.

In Watsonville, children also had the opportunity to participate in games, arts and crafts and

physical activities through a partnership with city Parks and Community Services.

The program, which cost about \$50,000, was funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Santa Cruz County and grants from the Driscoll's Charitable Fund at the Community Foundation and Uyematsu Farms.

La Manzana, which is based at 521 Main St. in downtown Watsonville, is a program of the nonprofit Community Bridges.

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