

# The *a vision for our Age-Friendly community* OUTLOOK



A publication by the Saratoga Area Senior Coordinating Council (SASCC) | 19655 Allendale Ave Saratoga, CA 95070 | Phone: 408.868.1257 / Fax: 408.868.9546

## A fruitful harvest: Saratoga Heritage Orchard produces thousands of pounds of apricots for people in need

*City partnered with nonprofit Village Harvest to carry out mission*

By Cici Xu

With the mission in mind to provide fruit to people in need, volunteers with Village Harvest, a nonprofit organization in the San Francisco Bay Area, gathered on July 1 as the sun set on the Saratoga Heritage Orchard to harvest and sort the last of the season's ripe apricots.

During the 18-day apricot season, Village Harvest picked a total of 8,130 pounds of apricots from 11 harvests in eight different orchards around the Bay—about 5000 pounds more than last year's harvest. Over 3,000 of those pounds were from Saratoga's historical orchard, located on the corner of Saratoga and Fruitvale Avenues.

"We ended up doing five harvests at the Saratoga Heritage Orchard," said Craig Diserens, the Executive Director of Village Harvest, surprised by how well the orchard was preserved during the dry season. "It was actually the most abundant location that we harvested by a longshot."

"The city of Saratoga

was very community-minded in sharing fruit. It's been terrific to work with some of the city people and the people in the Orchard Keepers, the organization that's maintaining the orchard now."

The city-owned Saratoga Heritage Orchard is one of the few maintained orchards in the city, serving as a reminder of the agricultural history that once was. Apricots are known as a specialty fruit, but Diserens noticed that it has been largely appreciated by the people in the community because "they're a fruit from our Valley's past."

Prior to Saratoga's final iteration as a residential community, the city began as a frontier town and an industrial settlement before becoming an agricultural hub.

"There used to be many fruit orchards and vineyards in Saratoga," the City of Saratoga's Public Information Officer Lauren Pettipiece said. "From cherries and apricots, to French prunes, Saratoga's bountiful fruit harvests made it a popular

trading post."

To maximize the use of Saratoga's resources, the city granted Village Harvest permission to harvest this season's Heritage Orchard apricots, supporting the organization's mission of providing a healthier lifestyle for those in need, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One in ten people in the Bay Area received food assistance before the pandemic, according to Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, one of the largest food banks that Village Harvest donates fruit to. Now, Second Harvest stated that number has doubled with around half a million people receiving food assistance.

"There is a tremendous need," Diserens said. "There are many people that are living pretty close to the edge in an expensive area. We are trying to distribute not just food and calories but healthy foods that everybody needs. But some of the healthiest food is actually some of the most expensive."

Diserens encouraged residents to donate extra



fruit from their backyard trees to Village Harvest, as every donation goes to someone in need.

"We encourage people to share their fruits and pass on what they don't need because that's the basics of sustainability, putting whatever nature is providing to good use," Diserens said. "It's okay to enjoy your own fruit tree. When you've got more than you, that's a good time to share it."

Compared to millions of

pounds of apples donated annually to food banks, Diserens acknowledged that backyard fruit or even 8,000 pounds of apricots may not seem significant. But practicing sustainability and appreciating community history offers a sense of purpose and leaves a positive impact on everyone involved.

To learn about volunteer opportunities with Village Harvest, visit [villageharvest.org](https://villageharvest.org).