

For Immediate Release

San Diego Residents Deliver 1,000+ Meals Supporting Health Care Workers and Bolstering Local Restaurants

April 15, 2020 (SAN DIEGO, CA) — The newly-formed Front Line Appreciation Group (FLAG) San Diego chapter has delivered more than 1,000 meals prepared by local restaurants to healthcare workers in the first week since its founding on April 6, 2020.

FLAG San Diego is solely dedicated to providing an urgently-needed boost to two groups heavily affected by the coronavirus: healthcare workers on the front lines and local restaurants. The premise is simple: donations to FLAG San Diego are used to make bulk purchases of meals from local restaurants; those meals are then delivered to frontline healthcare workers who are working tirelessly - often with very little time for meal breaks - to treat those affected by the coronavirus.

The original FLAG chapter was started in mid-March in New Jersey by **Liz Bernich** and **Gina McGuire**. They raised \$100,000 for the cause in just its first two weeks of existence.

Since then, more than 70 chapters have sprung up around the country, the latest in San Diego. Launched on April 7 by Christa Gallego and Jerrod Bennett, the group successfully delivered more than 1,000 meals in its first week.

“Morale is low, fear is high,” Bennett said. “Without knowing it, Christa and I each got started independently delivering small amounts of food to the medical community, before we joined forces under FLAG and decided to scale this to the whole of our city.”

Bennett and Gallego undertook a whirlwind recruiting effort, enlisting friends, family, and colleagues to fill FLAG San Diego’s formal roles. Neither had any previous experience in the nonprofit sector; their motivation was purely to support the healthcare workers and struggling businesses in their community.

“I think everyone in San Diego is worried about our restaurant industry,” said Gallego. “And so this movement is truly a win-win: We place large orders with restaurants—injecting large quantities of much-needed cash into these ailing businesses—while feeding our frontline medical professionals. Ultimately, we want to support as many local, family-owned food spots as we can, to ensure these places are still there when this pandemic has ended.”

Bennett and Gallego recognized that establishing a local FLAG chapter achieved three very important goals at the same time:

1. allowing donors to support two different groups without having to leave their houses or risk exposure;
2. supporting frontline healthcare workers, who are often overworked and demoralized during this challenging time; and
3. supporting local restaurants that are suffering from a lack of business during this period of social distancing.

Continued Financial Support Is Still Needed

However, this effort cannot continue without additional financial support and a more unified effort. "By donating a meal from the safety of our homes, we can continue to keep everyone safe and ensure that support is distributed to those that need it most," Bennett said. "We've got thousands more meals to deliver, and the only challenge left is to get more donations. A simple \$5 can get food into the hands of a first responder and give them a few minutes of relief in an incredibly difficult time."

"The restaurant industry has seen anywhere from a 70%-100% loss of income in this short period of time while expenses and bills are piling up." said Julian Hakim, owner of The Taco Stand. "We are trying our hardest to keep our doors open and keep people working, but the pressure is sky-high for us." Hakim has partnered with FLAG and will be delivering 150 meals to frontline workers on Tuesday.

FLAG San Diego cofounder Christa Gallego hopes to relieve some of the pressure on businesses like Hakim's: "We know our restaurants are suffering. Donating directly to your favorite food joint is great, but that doesn't keep supply chains moving. FLAG keeps all staff working, including vendors."

Contact Information

FLAG San Diego is a private volunteer organization. 100% of donations go to meal purchases; all administrative work is done on a volunteer basis.

FLAG San Diego

Founder Christa Gallego
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Available for media interviews. FLAG-SD can also arrange interviews with owners of local restaurants they have purchased from, and representatives of organizations that they have donated meals to.

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