

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NEED CONTINUES FOR COMMUNITY DRIVES THIS FALL *Fifty-five Community Drives Reach Over 38,500 Families*

THANK YOU TO DEL MONTE FOR OVER 1 MILLION POUNDS OF PRODUCE!
VISIT <https://youtu.be/hxnlZ8Y5awM>

[PORT HUENEME, CA – October 12, 2021] – Known as the number one importer of bananas on the West Coast, the Port of Hueneme celebrates this distinction each September by hosting a widely-attended Banana Festival. This year, out of an abundance of caution to guard against the spread of COVID-19, the festival was retooled to be a community block party and food distribution event for residents of the Southwinds neighborhood of Oxnard — marking the Port’s 55th “Committed to Community” food distribution event.

Collectively, these events have reached over 38,000 families throughout Ventura County providing donations of over 1 million pounds of produce from the Port’s banana customer, Del Monte Fresh Produce, as well as other contributions of nutritious food and necessities from Port partners including The United Farm Workers Union Foundation, Southwinds Neighborhood Council, Coastalkkeepers, Ventura County Healthcare Agency, LUCHA, Inc., Ventura County Library, and FOODShare.

“We know that the work done at the Port of Hueneme impacts the local community so when the pandemic began, we immediately began organizing food distribution events to respond to those in most need of food and other basic essentials,” said Oxnard Harbor District President, Jason T. Hodge.

As part of this effort, families in South Oxnard and Nyeland Acres also received over 500 school backpacks, notebooks, and school supplies in collaboration with Oxnard Student Success and Nyeland Promise.

To make the event more of a celebration of community, the Block Party featured entertainment by Mariachi Alma de Mexico, singer Juan Mendoza, Inlakech Cultural Arts Center, Las Chinas Oaxaquenas Dancers, Flor Bonita, and DJ Carlos, as well as other cultural ambassadors who graciously give their time to entertain the lines of people dealing with food insecurity in South Oxnard.

“At the onset of the pandemic, we saw the toll it was taking on our community and recognized to need to rethink our events and how we can embrace our mission of creating economic and social good,” said Kristin Decas, CEO & Port Director. “We want to applaud Del Monte, our longest standing customer of 42 years for stepping up during this time of need and make our community drive events possible.”



Art Bouvet, Del Monte Fresh Produce Community Support Leader and Warehouse Manager, at a community food drive

Under the strong leadership of the Board of Harbor Commissioners, the Port thought out of the box and transformed the Banana Festival into these Committed to Community events not only to contribute food and supplies, but to listen to and learn the priorities of our neighborhoods. The Port endeavored the creation of a Community Outreach Department which embarked in a listening campaign and has collected over 500 unduplicated surveys from stakeholders directly in South Oxnard and Hueneme.



Commissioner Jess J. Ramirez stands by the grocery bags provided by the Port for the 500 families who attended the event.

Oxnard Harbor Commissioner Jess J. Ramirez said: “Even though times are not so good for a lot of people, we want to bring a little bit of happiness. I’m thankful that we have understanding commissioners who feel the same way I do about bringing some of our resources.”

“We never intended to have 55 food distributions. However, the need for emergency relief organizing continues and the Port’s Community Outreach Department has answered the call,” said Miguel Rodriguez, Community Outreach Manager for the Port of Hueneme. “We are happy to see the families benefit from their Port’s contributions and continue to engage partners and other stakeholders to address our community’s needs directly. It’s gratifying and humbling to engage in this work with the many committed volunteers and street vendors that have donated their time to help others.”



Mayra Benitez Tadillo from the Ventura County Library gives out books to Block Party participants

About the Port of Hueneme

The Port of Hueneme is one of the most productive and efficient commercial trade gateways for niche cargo on the West Coast. The Port is governed by five locally elected Port Commissioners. The Port moves \$10.85 billion in goods each year and consistently ranks among the top ten U.S. ports for automobiles and fresh produce. Port operations support the community by bringing \$1.7 billion in economic activity and creating 15,834 trade-related jobs. Trade through the Port of Hueneme generates more than \$119 million in direct and related state and local taxes, which fund vital community services. In 2017, the Port of Hueneme became the first port in California to become Green Marine certified.

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