

Going the extra mile(s)

Cal State Gleaners

Richard Mosell had barely escaped the Camp Fire when he resumed serving his neighbors. For five years, he'd volunteered with the Paradise Gleaners, an organization that distributed donated food to seniors and others in need. (A college student in his 50s, Mosell was a beneficiary as well.) Days after the fire, he borrowed a pickup truck to bring bread and produce to refugees camped out in the Chico Walmart parking lot.

During one such delivery, he reunited with JoAnne Bond, the Gleaners' president. She asked Mosell, "You want this?"—meaning, leadership of the group—"You want to do this?"

Richard Mosell (right) and two volunteers unload a semi-truck full of food donated to Cal State Gleaners Disaster Response in Oroville.

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He replied, "Well, sure, I'll do that. I was going to do something; it might as well be this."

In four years since, Mosell and a core quartet have not only revived the half-century-old organization, they've also reinvented it. Paradise Gleaners is now Cal State Gleaners Disaster Response, based out of two warehouses at 125 Oro Dam Boulevard in Oroville, and transcends its original mandate.

The Gleaners still provides food for needy recipients: 600 a week who visit the facility. The group also warehouses and/or donates food for others—such as True North Housing Alliance, Berry Creek United and I AMS Garden in Concow—and supports students in need through the Butte County Office of Education and schools in the Oroville area.



"Well over 6,000 people are eating something that came from our warehouse every week," Mosell said. "It's really incredible."

Meanwhile, per the addition to the name, Cal State Gleaners' volunteers respond to disasters, notably wildfires. They've gone up and down Northern California to offer relief, on-site, to survivors of every wildfire

since 2020. Since that fire season, the organization has provided more than \$3 million in aid.

The Gleaners' facility is officially open 16 hours a week—Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.—but Mosell is usually there a lot more. He organizes deliveries Mondays and Tuesdays; he stays late.

"It's gotten so huge, I need a clone of me," he said.

He also needs financial help. Mosell estimated he's put \$200,000 into Cal State Gleaners, which currently is running a \$21,000 deficit pending its Camp Fire settlement. (Those inclined to support his cause can learn more at calstatedisasterresponse.org.)

Yet the Gleaners still distributes food for free rather than reinstating a previous weekly charge—and donates to other nonprofits such as True North, which operates the Torres Community Shelter in Chico. The Oroville-based group is separate from, but occasionally works with, the smaller-scale Chico Gleaners.

Paul Wolfe, True North's donations and volunteer coordinator, attributed 50,000 meals

The Cal State Gleaners group dedicates part of its warehouse space to donations for True North Housing Alliance's Torres Shelter and housing programs.

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served to homeless Chicoans since January to a partnership with Cal State Gleaners and the Latter-day Saints Church. Supplies from the Gleaners go beyond food: True North regularly gets bedding, and Mosell said the Torres Shelter (and others countywide) can expect twin beds following a donation from the Adventist Church in Paradise.

"We don't have a ton of resources," Wolfe said. "The ability of those organizations to fill our gaps has been just a real blessing to the shelter."

And when he's at the warehouse and points to something True North needs, Gleaners volunteers don't hesitate to get it—no matter how high the fork lift needs to rise.

"They're just really helpful, and they'll go the extra mile for anybody," Wolfe added. "They are a local hero."

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