



## CSA challenged by overflow from downward economy

Written by Bruce Barton - Town Crier Staff Writer Wednesday, 31 December 2008

**N**ot far from the multimillion-dollar homes in Los Altos and Los Altos Hills are lines of hungry and often homeless people, waiting in the cold at social services havens like the Community Services Agency (CSA) in Mountain View.

The weakened economy has forced more residents into the food lines than CSA Executive Director Tom Myers has seen in years. Myers observed that lines have been roughly twice as long as in the past.

Myers won't have any hard numbers until CSA officials undertake a major assessment of their services and resources in January. But anecdotally, Myers said, "These are the worst lines I've seen since the dot-com bubble burst of 2001-2002."

The double-edged sword for CSA and other such agencies is that when the economy slows, so do contributions. Corporate donations to CSA are down more than 50 percent, even as the client load increases dramatically.

Food and rent present the most pressing needs, Myers said. The economy is so bad for some, he said, that those still employed, but with reduced hours, are among those in the food lines.

Myers noted that the number of donations from individuals is up, although overall donations are down.

"Even though we're grateful to this caring community, 2009 is scaring me to death," he said.

The increase in clients, which began in the fall, continues even as many leave the area because they can no longer afford to live here. Myers referred to CSA statistics from recent mailers that showed 31 families (102 people) moved to other cities within California, 27 families (92 people) moved out of state and 48 families (169 people) moved with no forwarding addresses.

Although times are tough, Myers said he is confident the 51-year-old agency "will weather this storm. This organization is not going away – but we're in really turbulent waters." He said the January assessment should lead to "critical decisions, which will not be popular, about (cutting) programs."

According to Myers, CSA isn't an obvious choice for donations, "Our issues are not necessarily what people pay attention to."

CSA, located at 204 Stierlin Road in Mountain View, employs 20 people, 10 full time, is helped by 600 volunteers and serves approximately 6,000 people – 200 to 300 homeless – annually.

One of those clients is Dantis Sims, 55, an unemployed waiter currently living in Mountain View and looking for work to get his life back in order. After he lost his job at the Stanford Park Hotel in October, Sims blanketed prospective employers with résumés.

"No one was calling me back and I was getting behind on my rent," Sims said.

CSA has stepped in to help with rent money and food.

"This has been a help that I didn't know existed," he said.

For information about CSA or to donate, visit [www.csacares.org](http://www.csacares.org).

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*Photo Bruce Barton/Town Crier*

Long lines outside the Community Services Agency in Mountain View have demonstrated the heightened need for locals such as Dantis Sims, an unemployed waiter living in Mountain View.