

# Food Pantry LAX



June 2022

## Customer Profile: José Mejía, the “Cardboard Guy”

When José Mejía comes by the food pantry to pick up food for himself and his wife, he often does something else as well. He flattens the large number of cardboard food cartons the pantry discards, piles them neatly into his beat-up car and hauls them to a recycling station.

Collecting and selling cardboard is not an easy way for a 77-year-old to earn some extra cash, since the pay is paltry. But Mr. Mejía keeps at it.

“I need money to pay bills,” he says.

Volunteers at Food Pantry LAX are used to seeing the green 1995 Geo Metro of the “Cardboard Guy” pull into the parking lot. The tiny car, with a three-cylinder engine,



has 190,000 miles on it, but Mr. Mejía keeps it operating by repairing it himself.

By the time he arrives, most of the discarded cartons have already been flattened by pantry volunteers, making it easier for Mr. Mejía. Still, it is arduous work as he lays the dozens of flattened cartons on the ground and then tries to stuff as many as possible into the vehicle,

since he gets paid by the pound. The car has had its back seat removed to allow more space for cardboard. He loads the car so full that cardboard sticks out of the back and the open hatchback door points skyward, secured by a rope.

Food Pantry LAX does not by itself provide enough cardboard to fill even that small car, so Mr. Mejía has to collect

at three or four additional places. At the end, he receives only about \$14 for a full carload – about 300 pounds. He tries to deliver three carloads per week.

“It’s better than nothing,” he says.

Mr. Mejía came to the United States from Mexico in 1968 to pursue better economic opportunities and

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## Volunteer of the Year: Leah MacKinney-Buckley

Leah MacKinney-Buckley is a Westchester native who has lived in the area her entire life. She is married to Gary Buckley and has 2 children and 3 grandchildren. When she isn't busy serving others, Leah loves spending time with her friends and family, who she says are "the most important thing in my life."

A couple of years after Leah retired from nursing, she became interested in finding opportunities to serve in the community. She was already spending a lot of time volunteering with another organization when she spotted a call for Food Pantry LAX volunteers in The HomeTown News. She called the Food Pantry to find out what it would take to become a volunteer and was told to, "Come on over!"

Leah was pleasantly surprised when the manager at the time,

Dorothy Nino, put her right to work! That was five years ago and Leah has been volunteering at the Food Pantry ever since.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Leah was volunteering every other Friday. When the Food Pantry reopened after a brief closure at the beginning of the pandemic, Leah was one of the few volunteers who came every week. She was part of a devoted group determined to keep the pantry open to those who desperately needed food assistance.

Leah and three others came each Friday and took care of tasks usually managed by a much larger group of helpers: stocking shelves, bagging bread, repacking eggs, bagging and distributing bags of groceries, sorting produce, sweeping floors, cleaning the parking lot, etc. You name it, Leah did it, and she loved it.

"Every minute you put into a volunteer program you get back so much more," she says, "I leave exhausted, but

I love it. You always get back more than you give."

We honor Leah for her service to the commu-

nity and for her dedication to keeping Food Pantry LAX running these past two years. Thank you, Leah!



Top: Leah, in the pink sweater, handing out food last Christmas.  
Bottom: Food Pantry LAX President Andy Pollack presenting Leah with the Wilma Matz Volunteer of the Year Award.



(*JOSÉ Mejía Cont.*) worked as a television repairman until retiring. His cardboard scavenging now supplements his Social Security. He and his wife, Maria, have three children and nine grandchildren.

Mr. Mejía discovered Food Pantry LAX about five years ago when he happened to notice a pile of cardboard while driving past the pantry's building, which is on an industrial street in Inglewood. It was only after he went in to collect the cardboard that he learned



*José Mejía breaking down boxes and putting them in his car.*

he was at a place that could provide him with free food.

Now he comes regularly for the food, even when there is no card-

board. A few years ago, the price of recycled cardboard dropped so low it made no sense for him to collect it. More recently, there

are days when he finds the pantry's cardboard bin empty because some other collector has beaten him to it. "The cardboard business is very competitive," he says.

But whether he finds cardboard or not, he knows Food Pantry LAX will always give him two hefty bags containing canned goods, eggs and bread, and two other bags containing fresh fruits and vegetables. "It helps a lot," he says.

## Food with a Boost: COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics at Food Pantry LAX

This past year, in addition to distributing food to our customers, Food Pantry LAX partnered with the LA County Department of Health Services to host four successful pop-up COVID-19 and flu vaccine clinics.



## Drivers Needed!

Food Pantry LAX is looking for volunteers who can help with food pickup and delivery to the Food Pantry. If you have a large vehicle and would be willing to help transport goods, please contact us at 310-677-5597.



Food Pantry LAX gratefully thanks the organizations and individuals that regularly provide us with food. One way you can show your support for Food Pantry LAX is by patronizing or supporting these organizations:

Vons, Centinela Avenue  
Cadoro Bakery  
Togo's, Westchester  
Bristol Farms, Manhattan Beach  
Manhattan Bread & Bagel, Manhattan Beach  
Noah's NY Bagels, Marina del Rey  
Holy Nativity Episcopal Church community garden  
Food Forward/Social Justice Learning Institute  
Westside Food Bank  
Westchester Farmers' Market

Food Pantry LAX would also like to thank the many individuals and organizations that contribute money or bring food donations to the pantry.



**OUR MISSION:** Food Pantry LAX is a supplementary food resource for low-income clients in Inglewood, Westchester, El Segundo, Hawthorne and portions of Los Angeles. Our policy is to provide food for 2 days or six meals to our clients.

**Food Pantry LAX is located at**

355 E. Beach Avenue  
Inglewood, CA 90302  
310-677-5597

**Food Distribution:**

Tuesday and Friday  
9:30am—12:00pm

**Mailing Address:**

8726 S. Sepulveda Blvd.  
Suite D PMB 741  
Westchester, CA 90045

**Email Address:**

FoodPantryLAX@gmail.com