Photos Sophie Braccini

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Huge Community Effort to Feed 10,000 People

By Sophie Braccini



Siamack Sioshansi gives instructions to the volunteers

by the all-volunteer group seemed

daunting at first, but founder Siamack

vegetables and fruit when so many

volunteers made the impossible happen in just two weeks: they created

the infrastructure and gathered the

50,000 pounds of fresh fruit to those

from the Food Bank of Contra Costa

and Solano County introducing me to

a widow who lives in Vacaville," said

Sioshansi. "She explained that her late

husband planted 812 persimmon trees

fruit rotted on the trees. This year, she

wants to donate the fruit to the needy."

founded the Urban Farmers, an all

with a mission that evolved from

helping suburbanites grow their own food to gleaning the thousands of

pounds of fruit that is wasted every year by people who grow more than

is a reminder of how fortunate my

family has been, and when I think of

helping the hungry, I try to find a better option than donating cans of

soup or six pounds of fresh, tree-

Last Saturday morning, the trees in the Vacaville orchard seemed to be

which one would you pick?"

"The annual Thanksgiving feast

they need.

A few years ago, Sioshansi

"(On Oct. 31) I received a call

in need.

weighted down to the ground with distributed over the next weeks to small army of volunteers, many A from Lamorinda, gathered at the property of Charlotte Sturgeon in Vacaville Nov. 16 at the urging of the local non-profit organization Urban Farmers to pick as much as possible of the thousands of pounds of persim-

volunteers to harvest and distribute ing, he must be very happy." food bank. They were then taken by a small pick-up to the larger Loaves and Fishes trucks, which began to fill and shortly after the planting, he very quickly. "I just love persimpassed. Her orchard has now matured mons," said Pars. "I just bite into them and since she is not a farmer, she does like in an apple, or sometimes I cut not know what to do with all the fruit. them in thin slices and eat them with

"The volunteers from the local churches came to serve lunch to the

ripened fruit? If you were poor, around 3 p.m. when the 50,000 pound Food Bank could take," said Sioshansi. The fruit, which preserves begging to be picked, many branches well in cool, dry conditions, will be

ripe, juicy, bright orange persimmons. hungry families around the East Bay. The volunteers came from all over the Bay Area, from San Francisco to Urban Farmers, visit www.theurban-Sacramento to San Ramon, with probably the largest contingent arriving in two buses filled with Saint mons that would otherwise go to Mary's College students. Those fawaste. This new challenge taken on miliar with persimmon trees came with cutters and gloves; the students just made it work by twisting the firm Sioshansi cannot stand wasting fresh fruit a few times.

Sturgeon was pleased. "My late people are hungry. He and his core husband was his own man and he had all these business ideas," she said. "I don't know why he planted all these trees, but if he can see us this morn-

Tina Pars, of Orinda, was one of the many volunteers who worked in pairs, endlessly dropping persimmons into milk crates before transferring them to larger crates provided by the Last year over 100,000 pounds of Brie.

Other organizations helped with technical aspects of the harvest. Moraga Hardware and Lumber owner Bill Snider donated 100 picking poles and volunteer Lafayette-based non-profit Charter Pro, a local transportation company, offered the use of its buses. In addition to the 100 Saint Mary's volunteers, Diablo Valley College recruited 50 helpers, UC Davis sent 100 people and The Athenian School, which has an orchard of 125 fruit trees that are harvested for donation,

sent a busload of students and parents. working volunteers, and the list goes soup," said Sioshansi. "One can of on," said Sioshansi.

> The volunteers stopped picking objective was reached. "That's all the



Volunteers pick persimmons.



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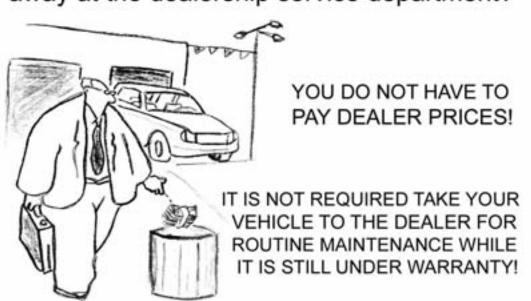
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