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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**“STONE SOUP” COMPETITION HELPS ALAMEDA COUNTY
RAISE 5 TONS IN FOOD DONATIONS FOR ANNUAL HOLIDAY FOOD DRIVE**

Stir the creative juices that flow within Alameda County’s 9,000-plus employee workforce, mix in some friendly competition among eight County departments, add a healthy splash of holiday spirit and what do you get?

Alameda County’s first-ever Stone Soup Holiday Food Drive and Design Competition, which culminates this week with some inspired displays made entirely with boxes and cans of nonperishable food. The imaginative creations - which include a Bay Bridge montage, a computer work station and a 3-D depiction of Alameda County replete with landmarks such as Mission Peak and the Altamont windmills – were created with 10,000 pounds – or 5 tons - of edibles donated by County employees in time for the holidays. The total donations mark a more than 3-fold increase over last year’s total.

The Stone Soup competition is a new spin on what is an annual rite for Alameda County – a holiday food drive in which County employees pitch in to help the families in need through donations of food and cash to Alameda County Community Food Bank.

But by injecting friendly competition and new levels of inspiration into the tradition – Alameda County has more than tripled its usual donations of food, and raised about \$4,000 in cash as well. The Food Bank can distribute \$4 of food for every \$1 in cash that is donated.

“The level of creativity, determination and community spirit shown by our County employees is thrilling to behold,” said Susan S. Muranishi, County Administrator. “Not only have they brought in record numbers of donations through this effort, they also have created some powerful displays that drive home the message about hunger right here in our community.”

Each year at this time County employees are reminded to pitch in by contributing healthy, non-perishable food items to the signature red Food Bank barrels that are set up in most County buildings. The effort usually nets about 3,000 pounds of donated food as well as cash – as does a similar food drive the County conducts in the summer months. Each effort supports the Alameda County Community Food Bank in its mission to put food on the tables of children and adults struggling with the burden of hunger.

The recent run of tough economic times, as well as a reduction in federal food assistance benefits that took effect on November 1, mean the Food Bank faces a particularly daunting task this year in seeking to ensure that all hungry families and individuals in our community are fed.

These factors prompted County leaders to call for a new level of creativity and community spirit this year. The idea of a Food Drive and Design Competition actually came from the County's General Services Agency, which used a similar format for an internal department Food Drive in 2012. This is the first time the concept has been taken Countywide, however, and the response has been quite impressive. Participants now await the word of a panel of judges that will determine which County department has created the most interesting and inspiring art pieces with donated cans and boxes of food.

Many of these clever creations are now on display in County facilities – including a “Scales of Justice” display in the lobby of the County Counsel's office on the Fourth Floor of 1221 Oak Street, Oakland, and a computer work station in the lunch room of the Information Technology Department at 1106 Madison Street, Oakland. This work space is composed of computer, computer keyboard, table, chair and filing cabinets constructed entirely of containers of donated food.

“This project demonstrates the strong ties between County departments, County employees, community organizations and the community that we serve,” said Keith Carson, President of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. “At a time when many individuals and families are still struggling to put food on the table, County employees have responded by increasing their commitment to combatting hunger through the annual Holiday Food Drive.”

Judging will take place over the next several days. The results will be announced Tuesday, November 26, at the weekly meeting of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

The story of Stone Soup is an old fable celebrating individual generosity and collaboration amid difficult times. It involves a group of hungry soldiers who wish to make a meal but find they have only water and stones for their soup. They turn to the people of a village for nutritious contributions to their soup and find that when each person offers a small amount of food, they have enough ingredients to make soup to feed themselves and the entire village as well.

All donations from the Stone Soup Food Drive go to the Alameda County Community Food Bank, which provides hunger relief for 49,000 people in our community each week – two-thirds of whom are children and seniors.

“Alameda County is an incredible partner in our work to end hunger,” said Suzan Bateson, executive director of Alameda County Community Food Bank. “We applaud their effort to come up with this clever way to both expand the reach of their annual Holiday Food Drive and deliver the message to the public about how difficult it continues to be for some of our residents just to put food on the table.”