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## CERES COMMUNITY PROJECT



CHRISTOPHER CHUNG / The Press Democrat

Linnea Nierenberg, a junior at Analy High School, roasts peppers last week while volunteering at the Ceres Community Project in Sebastopol. The organization provides meals for seriously ill Sonoma County residents and their families.

# A CHANCE TO GROW

Program of teens cooking healthy meals for sick residents may expand reach if it can raise funds to fix Sebastopol building

By **BOB NORBERG**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

**T**he nonprofit Ceres Community Project kitchen, where teenagers stand shoulder to shoulder cooking meals for seriously ill Sonoma County residents and their families, may soon vastly extend its reach.

Ceres, which was started three years ago, plans to take over a vacant Sebastopol building, said executive director Cathryn Couch.

"It will allow us to triple, from 45 clients and families to 120 clients and families, from 27,000

meals a year to 80,000 meals a year," Couch said. "It is dramatic what it will allow for program growth."

The 2,500-square-foot building is a prefabricated portable next to the Sebastopol fire department. It was left to the city by Sonoma County, which moved its services program out a year ago.

Sebastopol Planning Director Kenyon Webster said the building was considered for city offices and for a small business incubator but is in need of a major renovation.

Ceres would get a rent-free, 10-year lease in return for making improvements that could cost \$360,000. The city would pay \$45,000 toward the renovation costs.

The city would get some access to the commercial kitchen as an incubator for small food

businesses and access to a 700-square-foot meeting room for city functions and nonprofit organizations.

Ceres, which stresses how healthy food can aid healing, now uses the facilities at Capers & Co., a Sebastopol caterer that allows its kitchen to be used by nonprofit groups.

The program has 10 teen volunteers from high schools, Santa Rosa Junior College and Sonoma State University cooking the meals Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays under the supervision of two adults.

It's a production-line environment, but they also learn some cooking skills, Couch said.

The ingredients are meats, produce, fruit and dairy products donated by local stores and ranches.

The meals, which can last the ill patient and

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Photos by CHRISTOPHER CHUNG / The Press Democrat

**Ceres Community Project head mentor and team coordinator Rob Hogencamp, left, reads a letter of appreciation from a client to teen volunteers Cameron Holl, Sofia Armstrong, Lucas Tamminen and Sam Bright-Thonney last week. The group provides meals for seriously ill residents and their families.**

## **MEALS:** Families lack income, support system

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their families for five or six days, are delivered by other volunteers, Couch said.

Last year, Ceres produced 27,000 meals for 45 families, of which 90 percent were cancer patients.

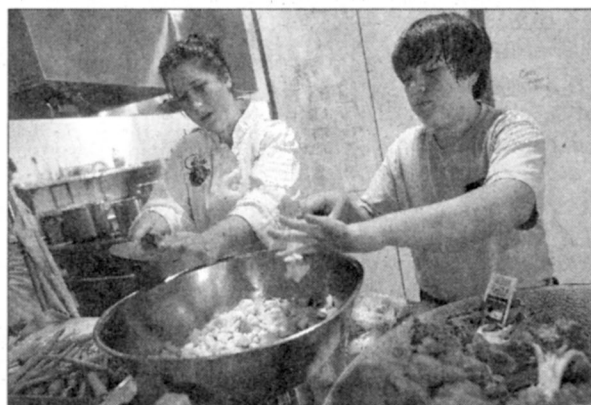
"The majority of our clients are low income and they don't have a support system. They would literally be eating oatmeal or seasoned crackers," Couch said.

Ceres also has a Healing Foods cooking course for people recovering from serious illness, low-cost community classes on healthy foods and a lecture series at the Center for Spiritual Living in Santa Rosa on food and healing.

The nonprofit group has an annual budget of \$300,000, of which \$45,000 is from the sale of its cookbook, of sauerkraut product and class fees. The rest is from donations.

The cost of renovating the building and addition of a commercial kitchen was estimated at \$360,000, but Couch said that with the donation from the city and Community Builders contractors, which helps nonprofits with facilities, the cost could be as low as \$200,000.

That money, however, still needs to be raised, Couch said.



**Sofia Armstrong and Sam Bright-Thonney dice mushrooms while volunteering at the Ceres Community Project in Sebastopol.**

"It is a great opportunity and it is not a done deal," Couch said. "We really need donors and support to step forward at this point to invest and make it happen. Until we get funding in place, it is nothing more than a great opportunity."

*You can reach Staff Writer Bob Norberg at 521-5206 or [bob.norberg@pressdemocrat.com](mailto:bob.norberg@pressdemocrat.com).*