

Five Tons of Food, 140 Volunteers, One Mission: Santa Barbara Dojo Brings Thanksgiving to Hundreds of Local Families

SANTA BARBARA, CA, UNITED STATES, December 5, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Nearly 1,900 people in need celebrated Thanksgiving this year, thanks to the [Santa Barbara Dojo](#) volunteers who delivered baskets filled with complete dinners during the martial arts academy's 15th annual Thanksgiving Basket Brigade.

The Basket Brigade is a volunteer-based initiative that fundraises, purchases and assembles Thanksgiving dinner baskets, including a turkey and all the fixings, providing them to families who would otherwise go without. The baskets are delivered directly to the households which signed up for assistance, through a partnership with local shelters and low-income housing, and the People's Self Help Housing and Family Service Agency (FSA) of Santa Barbara County.



Grand Master Melodee Meyer and volunteer students from the Santa Barbara Dojo help assemble baskets for their 15th Annual Thanksgiving Basket Brigade

“

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Grand Master Melodee Meyer

“The things we teach at the martial arts academy are all about character. We don't just talk about being generous—we want our students and families to practice it,” said Grand Master Melodee Meyer, co-owner and instructor at Santa Barbara Dojo. “This year we reached a record 375 families, and seeing everyone come together to help others is the best example we can give.”

Each basket is designed to feed a family of approximately five people and is funded through donations from individuals, families, and local businesses.

“When we first started in 2010, we only raised the funds through our students,” said Master Austin Curtis, co-owner and instructor at Santa Barbara Dojo. “But this is the second year we reached outside our academy because more people are signing up for help. And each time we found individuals and businesses are eager to step up and show their commitment and support to this community.”

This year’s notable community sponsors included Santa Barbara resident Andrew Wilson and Deco Drywall & Plaster, LLC, a local family run business.

For many of the Dojo’s youngest members, The Basket Brigade has become a hands-on introduction to service. Ten-year-old student Bodhi said the work is both fun and meaningful. “It’s kind of fun filling the boxes,” he said. “It helps people who can’t afford their Thanksgiving dinners.”

Longtime student and volunteer Meredith Medland, a third-degree black belt who has trained at the Dojo for nearly 20 years, said the event reflects the school’s approach to martial arts. “The most important part of being a black belt is the attitude, and that attitude starts with service,” Medland said. “This shows how much difference people can make when they come together.”

This year 140 volunteers came together and organized and assembled over five tons of groceries in just 29 minutes, delivering 375 baskets feeding roughly 1,875 people from low-income households.

While the Santa Barbara Dojo Basket Brigade is not currently non-profit, all donations go directly to purchasing groceries.

“We’re hoping to create a non-profit for our Basket Brigade in 2026, to make it easier for local businesses to make donations,” said Sensei Isabelle Curtis, an instructor and Basket Brigade organizer at the Santa Barbara Dojo.

“If you want to give back or teach your kids what Thanksgiving is truly about, this is the perfect way,” Curtis said. “You’ll never forget the feeling of helping someone who really needs it.”

About Santa Barbara Dojo

Santa Barbara Dojo is a family-run martial arts academy in Downtown Santa Barbara, with a new location in [Granada Hills](#), CA, and a third opening in [Goleta](#), CA, in January 2026. Opened in 2002 and voted “Best Of” in the Santa Barbara Independent for 15 consecutive years, the Dojo offers martial arts and fitness classes for all ages with a mission to strengthen families through self-defense training, character development, and community engagement.

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