

**HOST LEDE:** As more and more Californians get older and retire, there is a growing pool of people with time and skills that community organizations could put to work. But seniors here have a relatively low volunteer rate, and often feel isolated.

A 77-year old San Francisco man has found a way to stay involved. He forgets about his arthritis and his cane to do what he loves best: cook for his community. As part of our “Graying California” series, KQED’s Farida Jhabvala Romero has this story.

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*AMBI Kitchen sounds, cutting sounds*

In his small kitchen, Emam Saber holds a butcher knife and trims one of the 30 New York steaks he's laid out on a cutting board.

**EMAM: All my work here is for charity. I didn't charge anything and I pay every penny of my own money.**

That's his \$660 dollar social security check, and money his wife Hewida earns from running a daycare out of their apartment in San Francisco.

*AMBI Child's voice -- What is that? - Look! (goes under)*

In the kitchen -- next to the living room where the kids are -- Emam's got two pans on the stove.

*AMBI Sizzling steaks*

He says the oil has to be smoking hot before putting the meat on.

**EMAM: It seals the flavor but if you put the stake and it's not hot, all the juice come down and you lose everything.**

Emam worked for decades as a chef at fancy hotels and a french restaurant. Even now that he's retired, and has arthritis, he loves to cook.

**REPORTER: Why do you like it?**

**EMAM: Because I like to eat good (laughs)**

Growing up in Cairo, Egypt, he was one of 19 kids. He remembers watching his mother cook *big* meals with neighbors to share. He says in those days, men weren't allowed in the kitchen.

**EMAM: Only the ladies. But I was the only one that break the rule because from seven years old I start talk I love cooking and I couldn't stop resisting that.**

Emam came to San Francisco in 1969. He's lived in the same flat ever since, recreating that bustling family feel from his childhood.

For him, community is number one.

**EMAM: God created us to be around each other, to be human to each other. And that's why you enjoy the life.**

For decades Emam has cooked for people at mosques, schools and nonprofits. He's the guy that volunteers to bring food for Ramadan, a baby shower, or the Christmas party at St. Anthony's -- an organization that feeds the homeless.

**LYDIA: What sticks with me the most when I think about Emam is his generosity and joyful spirit.**

Lydia Bransten works at St Anthony's. She says Emam made for years a delicious middle eastern banquet of chicken, rice with almonds, and a polenta dessert with rose water and honey.

**LYDIA: He brings to his cooking and his meals this love of community and this this sense of that through sharing a meal with another human being that you build relationship and it's those relationships that keep us together in the end.**

*AMBI kitchen*

Back at Emam's flat, dinner is finally ready. He lays the cooked steaks on beds of rice.

**EMAM: I'm always busy, 50 years here and never stop.**

He covers the trays with foil, and gets ready to deliver them.

*AMBI foil sound in kitchen*

**EMAM: That's it! Now we go! A nananana**

He says goodbye to the kids in the living room, who just woke up from their nap.

**KIDS: (laughter) Bye! Bye Bye !**

A man of purpose. On his way. To feed the people.

**EMAM: Bye! Bye!**

In San Francisco, I'm Farida Jhabvala Romero.

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