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Who is that lunch lady?

By Dana Woldow

Visitors to PEACHSF.org are welcomed by a photo of our fabulous lunch lady Rosario Ghiotto. Rosie, as she is affectionately known to one and all, was the cafeteria manager at Aptos Middle School, where the "fixing school food" movement in San Francisco's public schools was born in the autumn of 2002. I had two children at Aptos at the time, and when our school's student nutrition committee began working with Student Nutrition Services to get junk food out of the Aptos cafeteria, Rosie was our eager partner.

An accomplished home cook, mother and grandmother, Rosie worked in the Aptos school kitchen for 13 years. With a large kitchen and two cafeteria lines to serve students, Aptos was one of the last "cooking" schools in San Francisco, but over time, Rosie watched with anguish as the menu moved away from scratch cooking, and relied more and more on frozen precooked food. Bucking that trend, she continued to cook in her cafeteria, including her own chicken and vegetable soup; students raved about it to their parents and begged for lunch money on cold winter days so as to be able to warm up with "Rosie's soup – Mom, it is SO good, you HAVE to let me have it!" You can see Rosie in action in the 2009 3-minute [film](#) we made with students at San Francisco's Lowell High School (Rosie comes in at about 1:50 and you can see her soup at about 2:00.)

Isn't that what we all want our kids to say about school lunch? Rosie is the very embodiment of what is needed to fix school food – a cafeteria manager who is a skilled cook, who has the facilities to oversee scratch cooking of simply healthy food, turning raw ingredients into hot nourishing meals children look forward to eagerly.

Sadly, the Rosies of the world are retiring, as Rosie herself did a couple of years ago, and with 50% of schools in America having no cooking facilities, too many schools would not be able to take advantage of Rosie's culinary skills even if they were lucky enough to be able to hire her or someone like her.

PEACHSF honors Rosie and those like her; we thank her for all of the years she nourished our children with her home cooked meals, and for her generosity of spirit in helping us get the "fixing school food" movement going in our city. She is our unsung hero, and the face of what school lunch should be.

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