



# Lots of Gobble

This high schooler puts turkey on the table

Local Heroes  
By Terry Kaufman

**A**aron Soskin can talk turkey. To be specific, the Rio Americano sophomore can talk about the more than 2,000 turkeys he has put on needy families' tables over the past three Thanksgivings. As the West Coast head of Turkeys 4 America, Soskin oversees an operation that likely will provide more than 1,000 turkeys to Sacramento-area families this holiday season.

It started three years ago, when Soskin was searching for a project to fulfill the community service component of his bar mitzvah obligations. A family friend told him about two kids he had seen on "The Today Show," a brother and sister from Boston who had established the nonprofit in 1996 after seeing a TV news story about a turkey shortage at their local food bank. Then 9 and 6 years old, Dan and Betsy Nally had taken it upon themselves to walk door-to-door collecting turkeys. They ended up delivering 36 turkeys to the Greater Boston Food Bank, and the seeds were planted for a movement that would spread across the country and ultimately provide more than 2.3 million servings of turkey to families in need.

Soskin contacted the Nallys and was so inspired by their story that he undertook their cause for his mitzvah project. It was intended to be a one-time commitment. The entire family got into the spirit as turkeys poured in and his mother Karen emptied out the garage freezer to handle the bounty. "My family has always



Teenager Aaron Soskin volunteers for Turkeys 4 America

encouraged me to take on projects like this," Soskin says. "They made it possible for me to take this one on."

In all, Soskin collected \$2,300—enough to purchase about 1,000 turkeys. He was hooked. The next year, the Nallys asked him to become their West Coast representative, and he couldn't say no. "I didn't realize what I was taking on," Soskin admits. He went into high gear, organizing a drive at his middle school in which the class that raised the most money was rewarded with a pizza party. In all, Arden Middle School students

raised more than \$1,600 in 2005 for Turkeys 4 America.

Soskin strategically partnered with the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services to ensure the best value for the money he collected. "Food banks have much greater buying power than I have," he says, "so it made sense to have the turkeys purchased through the food bank." The food bank was so impressed with Soskin's initiative that it sent him a certificate of appreciation for his bar mitzvah.

This year, with the help of his dad Neil, Soskin has set up a California nonprofit corporation, complete with its own bank account, to enable him to handle donations locally. His sister Kayla, an eighth-grader at Arden, is also involved. "She did a lot of work for me while I was gone this past summer," says Soskin, "and now we're going through our to-do list, sending out letters and planning school visits." The list of schools

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targeted for this year's campaign is the largest yet. Eventually, Soskin hopes to have a presence beyond Sacramento, setting up Turkeys 4 America programs in other California communities.

Such activism comes at a price. Soskin estimates that he spends about five hours a week on the project, a number that will escalate as the holiday approaches. With a full load of honors classes, soccer practice and other extracurricular activities, he predicts that something will be sacrificed. "I know that I'll have to miss some of my practices," he acknowledges. He adds wryly, "Homework will definitely be a challenge: The teachers cut me no slack."

Money comes in all year long, not just at Thanksgiving. "People find my letters after Thanksgiving and they send a check," says Soskin. But not everyone wants to give money. "Some people really want to donate turkeys, because it's more satisfying for them

to see what they're donating," he says. The food bank's huge freezer—no longer the Soskins' freezer out in the garage—can handle all such donations.

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Volunteering with the food bank, handing out food to those who struggle to make ends meet, has provided Soskin with a unique perspective on hunger in America. "It definitely makes you more thankful," he observes. "You see people standing on line—and the line goes around the corner—to get something that you and I take for granted." He notes the abundance of volunteers around Thanksgiving. "There is a need for volunteers every day of the year," he notes. "My hope is that people will find that it feels good to donate at Thanksgiving, and they'll be motivated to donate and volunteer at the food bank throughout the year."

Donations to Turkeys 4 America can be made year-round at [turkeys4america.org](http://turkeys4america.org); Aaron Soskin can be contacted at [turkeys4americawc@surewest.net](mailto:turkeys4americawc@surewest.net). Turkey donations, along with offers to volunteer, are welcome at the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services, 456-1980.

*NOTE: East Sacramento resident Carol Rivero and her daughter Analise, who recently returned from a month in Rwanda, will display photographs from their trip on November 10 at Body Tribe, 920 21st Street, from 6 to 10 pm. All proceeds will benefit the school in Rwanda where they volunteered.*

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