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Whole Foods donates food to vets for holiday

By Patrick Ball
Staff Writer

It would have been very easy for Whole Foods Market to donate a holiday dinner to the veterans living at the Bedford Veterans' Quarters. So, the supermarket decided to go one step further.

"I guess, traditionally, they [property owner Caritas Communities] do a dinner," said Michelle Ezzy, marketing team leader for Whole Foods Bedford. "It would have been a fairly simple thing to put that together. But, I was thinking of something that could be more long-range productive for these people."

On Monday, Whole Foods gave the tenants reusable shopping bags filled with \$25 worth of products.

Ann Dooley, marking director for Caritas Communities, said when she told Whole Foods that most of their properties offer residents \$25 gift certificates, Ezzy offered to make up gift bags.

"I thought it would be better for them to do something that's not a one-time stop," Ezzy said. She hopes to use Monday's gift bags "more as a launching pad to try and bring about a better way of looking at it and educating them on things they can do to make themselves a little more self-reliant."

Ezzy said the gift bag contents were selected to "try to show the veterans ways to eat



Courtesy photo

Michelle Ezzy, marketing team leader for Whole Foods Bedford, presents a bag of grocery items to Tom Fiannder, property manager of Bedford Veterans' Quarters, (left) and Gerry Maker, a resident.

healthy without resorting to a quick, easy McDonald's route." Included were breakfast, lunch, snack and dinner items that could be prepared using the quarters' kitchen capabilities. "I tried to pick products that would hopefully be not-too-challenging taste bud-wise," Ezzy said.

Many were from the Whole Foods 365 line, and almost all were organic. "The 365 line is extensive, and more is added daily," Ezzy said. "A very good portion of it now, more and more, is actually organic on top of that."

Whole Foods, the supermarket located closest to the veterans' quarters, has worked with Caritas in the past, pro-

viding a spread of food and drinks for the opening ceremonies and holding 5 percent day, and they are "throwing some ideas back and forth" about future collaborations, according to Ezzy.

"We just think they're terrific," Dooley said of Whole Foods. "A lot of people just think they're high-end."

"We're the grocery store that's within walking distance from them," Ezzy said. "We want to make it more accessible, so they're not afraid of the stigma of Whole Foods."

Ezzy said future possibilities for collaboration between Whole Foods and Caritas could include teaching a cooking class at the veterans' quarters, or ed-

ucating the residents about shopping at Whole Foods on a budget.

"They have been nice," resident James Johnson said of Whole Foods. "They're giving it with their heart."

Johnson said he enjoys being at the Veterans Quarters. "It is what you put into it," he said. "I came in with a goal, and that was to go to school."

Johnson said has been taking classes at Middlesex Community College for more than a year now.

The Caritas Communities Bedford Veterans Quarters, which offers 60 units of permanent housing for homeless veterans, opened Sept. 1 at the Bedford VA hospital. They have about 50 residents, according to Dooley.

Every resident is a veteran who was previously homeless, and a lot of them are working, Dooley said. "It's been really great. ... As far as I know, things are going very well. This is a great group of people. They're just terrific."

"Being here, as far as living, Caritas sponsoring this building is awesome," said a resident named Bob who declined to give his last name. "It offers first-rate everything for us as tenants. They're very good to us. The management they have for us is fantastic. I couldn't, personally, ask for anything better."