

# Cooper Gifts Meals to Camden Seniors for Thanksgiving Day

By STEVEN RODAS, Tap Into Camden  
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CAMDEN, NJ — Dawn Richardson, the director of community services at Northgate II, looks out at an empty lounge. The building, which houses hundreds of Camden seniors, would ordinarily be hosting a Harvest Fest, Movie nights, birthday parties and the occasional Bingo.

But no events have been possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced managers to pause gatherings that may put resident's health at risk - especially those that are older and considered more vulnerable to contracting the virus.

On Wednesday night when Cooper University Health Care, the Cooper Foundation, volunteers and community leaders handed out free meals to seniors, Richardson said the visits were as important as the food.



“We try to keep them in mind, many have been isolated since March,” Richardson told TAPinto Camden. “COVID has compounded their sense of loss. They've lost the connection to their community. So they're mourning those losses in addition to the losses of family and friends that are away for the holidays.”

Five carts with brown paper bags stacked with food took turns up and down the elevator at Northgate II's more than 20 floors. The apartment, one of 14 complexes and senior housing centers included in the food distribution, received over 350 meals from a total of 1,900.

Other locations included The Branches at Centerville, Ferry Manor, Kennedy Towers and Westfield Acres Senior.



“Estamos muy agradecidos,” said Rosalinda Perez, 75, who has lived at Northgate II for 38 years. “We're very appreciative.”

Perez said she plans to host a small family gathering for Thanksgiving with her daughter, Noeua Muñoz, 58, and a few other family members.



“It’s getting more serious, the pandemic, so we have to be very careful,” said Muñoz.

Councilwomen Sheila Davis and Shaneka Boucher, Councilman Angel Fuentes, Sheriff Gilbert “Whip” Wilson, Min. Wasim Muhammad, Chairman of The Cooper Foundation Board of Trustees, Philip Norcross, Camden County Freeholder Jon Young and about a dozen volunteers helped at the Northgate II efforts.

Wendy Tabor, 48, and Tjjani Bullock, 22, both of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), joined police detective and incoming school board member Clayton Gonzalez, 32, as they headed to the 15th floor.

All three knocked on doors, shouted greetings in both Spanish and English, handed out meals and wished smiling senior citizens a Happy Thanksgiving.

“There are people who are less fortunate than myself and any opportunity that I have to give is a great one,” said Bullock after making her rounds. “During COVID, people are losing their families, people are losing their health and it’s very important to give to this community.”



This year, Bullock said she’s thankful for her “relationship to the Lord,” which extends to the health of her and her family.

“I moved here three months ago and it just makes me happy to see the generosity,” said 71-year-old Camelia Rosario.

“For more than 130 years, Cooper has been a premier community partner with an unmatched history of doing outstanding work in our neighborhoods and investing resources in our community,” said Mayor Frank Moran. “With this donation, they are helping to uplift 1,900 of Camden's most vulnerable citizens.”



As the distribution wrapped up, Marilyn Mock, policy director for wellness services at Northgate II, took a moment to speak with the volunteers: “I just wanted to let you know how much this means to our residents here. The holidays are really difficult for many of us who have lost loved one and a lot of our tenants have lost others too...Just knowing that people they don't even know took the time out of your busy schedule around the holidays, to tell them that is something that’s really important.”

Cooper also donated 1,000 turkeys to Camden residents through community groups, faith-based organizations, and the South Jersey Food Bank on Nov. 21.

“Our mission extends beyond the boundaries of our hospital, and we are always looking at ways to support those in need, especially this year during the pandemic,” said George E. Norcross III, chairman of the Board of Trustee at Cooper University Health Care. “Now more than ever, we are proud to be working with many great community organizations to provide Thanksgiving turkeys to Camden families.”

<https://www.tapinto.net/towns/camden/sections/giving-back/articles/cooper-gifts-meals-to-camden-seniors-for-thanksgiving-day>

