

The 40 Hot Meal Project Huge Success For Local Restaurants and Food Bank

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MEDICINE HAT, AB (22/12/2020)– The 40 Hot Meal Project has raised over \$40,000 in under two weeks. The money raised through sponsorship is spent directly at local restaurants that are preparing individually packaged frozen meals that are then delivered to the Medicine Hat & District Food Bank for their hamper program.

The initiative was started following the Government of Alberta announcement of further enhancements to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Understanding how hard restaurants have been hit during the COVID pandemic, along with the knowledge that usage had increased at the food bank, Torrey Mattson, REALTOR® with The Home Team | Royal LePage Community Realty connected with Celina Symmonds, Executive Director with the Medicine Hat & District Food Bank to offer an idea.

The initial goal was to raise \$5,000 that would support a few local restaurants and the 157 individuals who were receiving a food bank hamper. The project took off right from the start, with 18 restaurants eager to participate and over 85 sponsors. Sponsorship ranges from local businesses, individuals, and co-workers, all wanting to do their part in helping those who help our community on a regular basis, as well as assisting our most vulnerable.

The 40 Hot Meal Project framework:

- Put a call out for local restaurants who are willing and able to provide affordable meals in freezer friendly, individually packaged, large quantities, all in an effort to replace lost revenues due to dine-in service shut down.
- Find generous sponsors who were willing to sponsor a minimum of 40 meals and donate them to your local food bank. Minimum sponsorship amount was set at \$250.00 for Medicine Hat region.
- Connect restaurants with sponsors through an email program in order to arrange direct payment between the two. Restaurants then deliver the sponsored meals to the food bank on scheduled dates ensuring that the food bank isn't overwhelmed with deliveries at any time.
- Create a Facebook Group to highlight restaurants and offer recognition for sponsors.

The success from the project was instant for many restaurants. A few have been able to keep a staff member employed, while others have made additional income to help cover overhead costs.

"This is an amazing initiative that has the potential for significant food security and economic impact if implemented across our region, province and even country. I think the immediate and incredible community support in Medicine Hat was unexpected by everyone involved, but certainly deserved due to the inventiveness and resourcefulness in putting the project together. The program as designed doesn't add a significant administrative burden to the food bank as it serves their existing food hamper clients (restaurants deliver to the food bank directly), does not create administrative burden for the organizing individual(s) or business (sponsors pay food providers directly) and provides an immediate revenue injection into a local restaurant industry struggling through an unprecedented year. I see the benefits as threefold:

1. Heat to eat ready professionally prepared meals distributed to community members requiring food security assistance.
2. Revenue injection into a very challenged local business industry that can help sustain operations and maintain employment for its workforce during/coming out of a what is a generally lucrative but now entirely lost holiday season and
3. A unique opportunity for businesses and individuals to support both food security and local business at the same time; in some instances where their historical holiday community support opportunities may not have otherwise been available due to pandemic related circumstances.

I speak to all three aforementioned benefits from the standpoint of a member of the Board of Directors for the Medicine Hat & District Food Bank, a restaurant owner participating in this initiative, an owner of another business that was able to donate to/support this program and a Past President of the Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce who holds a very keen interest in seeing our local business community thrive and continue its incredibly generous support of our not for profit sector. All this requires is a quarterback in your community to champion the partnerships between your food bank, restaurant industry and generous business community and it will be a win, win, win!" added Chris Hellman, co-owner of Moxies Grill & Bar, owner Mr. Lube, and Medicine Hat & District Food Bank Board Director.

Restaurant participation was not limited, knowing that franchises are also owned by local residents and community supporters, it was a goal to ensure that anyone who wanted to participate was not left out. In some cases, gift cards were purchased from a restaurant to support them and also to offer a special treat to youth who take part in the food bank's Brown Bag Lunch Program.

"The difference this makes for families is huge, my heart is full. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to support those who support the food bank.", says Celina Symmonds. The 40 Hot Meal Project will be providing meals to the food bank into the New Year because of the support from our community. Community helping community is what makes Medicine Hat a great place to live, work, and play.

For further information or questions, please contact;

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