

# Fresh food for families in need

Surplus food from Holyoke Community College has benefited hundreds of individuals and families who frequent area food pantries and social service agencies.

With the HCC campus now closed and all classes moved online because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the college donated its perishable food supplies to three area nonprofits, the Martin Luther King Jr. Family Center in Springfield, the YWCA Transitional Living Program in Holyoke and the Easthampton Community Center in Easthampton.

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts helped coordinate the donations.

In late March, college staff emptied the pantries and refrigerators at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute on Race Street. Stacy Graves, institute coordinator, estimated that the college donated about \$600 worth of produce, fruit, milk, eggs, butter, yogurt and cream to the YWCA Transitional Living Program. The food had been slated for use in HCC's Culinary Arts program.



Sarah Schmidt, director of programming for Holyoke Community College's Center for Excellence, and Stacy Graves, coordinator of the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, load a cargo van with surplus produce and other food.

"I hope you guys like carrots and potatoes because there's lots of them," Graves said to Sharifa Forbes, the YWCA program supervisor, as they unloaded the van. "We really do appreciate it," Forbes said. "Thank you so much for this. This is awesome."

Tess Gordon, the YWCA's direct service advocate, said the food would be portioned out for the dozen or more teen moms who live with

their children at the center, where they prepare their own meals.

"Right now, with COVID-19, it's hard for them to go out into the community to shop, especially with keeping their kids safe," Gordon said.

"I wish I could give you a big hug," Forbes said to Graves from a safe distance in the parking lot outside the center. "It helps out a

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lot. Times are uncertain. The girls are nervous."

On another day, after emptying the walk-in coolers of the college's cafeteria kitchen, Mark Pronovost, HCC director of Aramark/Dining Services, delivered nearly 400 pounds of assorted produce, fruit and dairy products to the Martin Luther King Jr. Family Center, enough food, he was told, for 327 meals.

**"If we hadn't done this we would just be throwing all the food in the trash. It's impressive that HCC is willing to do this, and I'm very happy to do."**

Mark Pronovost, HCC director of Aramark/Dining Services

Pronovost also cleaned all the perishables out of the college's vending machines and delivered those items — fresh fruit, dairy products, yogurt, chips, popcorn, and pretzels and other retail products to the Easthampton Community Center, which runs a food pantry for area residents and works closely with HCC's Thrive Student Resource Center to provide free backpacks and school supplies to low-income students and families.

"If we hadn't done this we would just be throwing all the food in the trash," said Pronovost. "It's impressive that HCC is willing to do this, and I'm very happy to do."