

# ***Pontiac's United Wholesale Mortgage gives \$2K per day to restaurants to cook for shelters***

**Chanel Stitt**

Detroit Free Press

03/02/2021



When Pontiac-based United Wholesale Mortgage set out to donate hot meals from restaurants to local shelters, they asked the community to nominate the restaurants.

The result? The company received over 1,600 nominations of restaurants within five days.

UWM is purchasing up to \$2,000 worth of food from a restaurant every day until March 31 to give to shelters. The public can designate in an [online survey the restaurants and shelters](#) they think need help.

The food will be delivered to one of three groups in Pontiac: [Grace Centers of Hope](#), [Hope Against Trafficking](#) and the [Baldwin Center](#).

"It (the initiative) was very, very positively received by the restaurants because they're getting a good amount of business for the day and being able to deliver great, warm meals to homeless shelters as well," Mat Ishbia, president and CEO of United Wholesale Mortgage, said. "Two groups are winning instead of just one, so we're proud to be able to do that."

It's a critical time to help local businesses and nonprofits, Ishbia said. He said helping local restaurants and shelters is a passion of UWM.

"We'd love to be able to help everybody, but we obviously can't. It was really nice to see the community come out to support the restaurants and the people that run those that they love," he said.

Some of the restaurants that have participated in the initiative so far include Guido's Premium Pizza in Pontiac, Anita's Kitchen in Ferndale, Pops Family Restaurant in Waterford, Heroes Restaurant in Waterford, Leo's Coney Island in Pontiac, Tavern on the Main in Clawson and Fillmore 13 Brewery in Pontiac.

Berkley Common, a traditional gastropub with a global twist in Berkley, was nominated to receive funding. It prepared the food that was set to be delivered to the Baldwin Center, which is a human services agency. The Baldwin Center then distributed the food to Grace Centers of Hope, a homeless shelter.

"It feels great," said Katie Kutscher, owner of Berkley Common. "We've worked really hard before COVID and during COVID to solidify relationships with other organizations that help out, whether it's fundraising for schools or shelter meals and hospital meals. We've always been actively involved in the community, so I'm glad that the community took notice."



Kutscher said with restaurants being at 25% occupancy because of COVID-19 restrictions, large purchases of food can make a huge difference to the bottom line.

"These types of collaborations, especially during this unprecedented time, keep restaurant employees employed," Kutscher said. "And packaging the food, knowing it's for a great cause, makes everybody's morale really high. So it feels good all around."

Berkley Common is open for indoor dining, carryout and outdoor dining in igloos that can fit up to six people and a winter wonderland lodge experience. Soon, the restaurant is opening a bar-lounge that is a private event space upstairs.

UWM has been a longtime donor to Grace Centers of Hope in Pontiac, a one-year faith-based homeless shelter and addiction rehabilitation facility. The shelter is separated with a men's side and a women and

children's side, and each side receives a hot meal from local restaurants through the initiative on Saturday and Sunday evenings.

"It's fantastic," said Mark Cunningham, public relations and communications director at Grace Centers of Hope. "While we do get great donations of food and we have some really good cooks, to get a catered meal from a good local restaurant is quite a treat. And it brightens up a day."

Many local businesses contribute to residents at Grace Centers of Hope, including **Metro Wire & Cable**, Sarah's Bath Boutique, Iannuzzi Manetta CPA firm, CAPS Remodeling and iMBranded. These businesses donate items such as snow shovels, GED books, gift cards, toiletries, meals and financial support.



Grace Centers of Hope is staffed by many residents of the shelter who give back to the facility during their stay, including as cooks. The program's residents are obtaining their GEDs, receiving case management for life skills and addiction recovery, searching for jobs and taking their children to the in-house day care. So Cunningham said initiatives like this let their residents know that even though they may be at a low point in their lives, things will be OK and that people care about them.

"This kind of shows how much they do think about us," Cunningham said. "That they don't just want to do the same thing over and over. They thought what can we do that's cool, that's different, that's fresh. They really definitely have a soft spot for us."

*Contact staff writer Chanel Stitt on Twitter: [@ByChanelStitt](https://twitter.com/ByChanelStitt).*