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Alex Paniagua

FVSBank Donates Shelf-Stable Take-Home Foods for Senior Center Clientele

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A donation of two pallets of shelf-stable food to the Fond du Lac Senior Center illustrates FVSBank's commitment to its community. The donation translated to more than \$2,200 of food packed into 96 bags to provide pantry items for 126 senior citizens who eat regularly through the center's meal program.

Longtime relationships between leaders at the two organizations—within walking distance on downtown First Street—made it “normal” for the bank to do a pandemic check-in and for Senior Center Director **Cathy Loomans** to feel comfortable sharing her wish to help seniors stock up on shelf-stable essentials during Wisconsin's winter season.

“Wisconsin winters can cause havoc on transportation—and even if we are here to serve the meals, many of our people are hesitant to drive in bad weather, or are at the mercy of friends/neighbors/paid contractors to plow out their driveways in order for them to get their vehicles out,” Loomans said. “People who live in apartment complexes are affected by this almost more so than people in their own homes. The thoughts of people not having something to eat in this situation was unacceptable to me and I needed to fix it. **Kirsten Quam** reached out—voilà! Care packages.”

“Kirsten exemplifies our organizational commitment to our Fond du Lac community and neighbors,” said FVSBank President and CEO **Steven R. Schmuldach** about Quam, who is chief marketing officer and assistant vice president at FVSBank. “We have many, many Bank employees who serve our community as volunteers, coaches, and caring neighbors. The Bank has been rooted in Fond du Lac since 1934, and we are local in every sense of the word. Kirsten and Cathy both knew the Bank would want to support the senior center in caring for its people.”

Since mid-March 2020, the Fond du Lac Senior Center has been providing meals through a drive-up system to about 100 seniors each weekday. The midday meals consist of both ready-to-eat hot entrees and cold side dishes. Prior to the pandemic, the city-operated center served the meals provided by the county mainly via onsite dining; the drive-up system was implemented to continue to provide nutrition, while also protecting seniors from potential COVID-19 virus spread known to happen in group dining settings. Many seniors picking up a lunchtime meal tell Loomans that is their only daily human, social interaction; many also truly need the food and rely on the meal. The center has served more than 21,000 drive-up meals since last March.

The “Winter Care Packages” funded by FVSBank each included a half-dozen microwavable entrees, a six-pack of applesauce, a four-pack of mandarin oranges, a package of granola bars, a package of oatmeal packets, and a box of saltine crackers, which Quam sourced with help from Festival Foods. The pallets were delivered to the Senior Center, where Loomans packed the reusable bags supplied by the Bank and added jars of peanut butter donated by The Meadows Senior Living facility. Care packages supplied to couples included additional entrees. Loomans—who has come to deeply know her senior clients' fears, losses, and financial challenges from their short daily interaction—distributed the bags to those she knew relied most on the center's food service.

“Gratitude, shock, even some tears,” were the responses from those receiving the pantry items, Loomans said. “I believe that the reactions aren't even as much about the food as it is about knowing that our community cares for them and is looking out for them. Our Center would not be what it is without our community and the relationships and partnerships that we have. This is a perfect example: We see a need, and our community steps up to help meet that need. In this case, FVSBank donated over \$2,200 worth of food. We hear so often about how it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to care for our seniors—and we are so fortunate Fond du Lac is that village.”

While pre-COVID events at the Senior Center included more than 300 programs on-site each month, the center continues to connect with members through virtual, online programming and a newsletter, as well as meals. Friends of the Fond du Lac Senior Center, Inc., is a 501(c)3 group that is dedicated to raising funds to support programs and activities at the center, which serves community members age 50 and over. Visit <https://www.fdlwi.gov/senior-center/> for more information.

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