

# The Capital

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## Dining on Main Ingredient's dime

Restaurant invites 30 local needy to the café for holiday meal

By [ELISHA SAUERS](#) Staff Writer

Many individuals and businesses make it a tradition to donate canned goods to charities this time of year, but a locally owned restaurant wanted to give the less fortunate more than just food.

The owner and staff of Main Ingredient at 914 Bay Ridge Road provided a dining experience, something many of those in attendance hadn't had in quite a while.

About 30 Light House homeless shelter residents, munching up a tab of about \$500, sat down for a meal together Monday night, and everything - including the desserts - was on the house.

Christy Rossetti, the restaurant's general manager, said the owner was explicit that he did not want to create a planned menu for the residents.

"He said, 'Let them order whatever they want,'" Rossetti said. "We just really wanted them to enjoy a nice evening."

For Kara McDonald, a Light House tenant since August, it was a steak entree. And while her 2-year-old son, A.J., happily nursed on a bottle from a high chair, her other son, Ian, going on 6, colored in a picture on his paper place mat, eagerly awaiting pizza.



By Matt Cole — For The Capital

Annapolis resident Marty Burgess, a volunteer at the Light House homeless shelter, and James Thomas, a Light House resident, chat as they wait for a free meal, compliments of the Main Ingredient cafe on Bay Ridge Road. For a holiday event, the restaurant staff invited 30 Light House guests Monday night for anything they wanted off the menu.

"I was shocked," McDonald said when she heard Monday morning about the opportunity. "But then I was like, 'Well, cool.' "

Eating out is a luxury she hasn't experienced much recently. She lost her job and her house this summer.

"And it all just came crashing down at once," she said.

Knowing that it has been a particularly tough year for folks, Howard Mont, a shelter volunteer and board member of the Friends of the Light House Inc., began planning the event. For the past few months, Mont has helped cook breakfast at the Light House for tenants.

He contacted Main Ingredient because the restaurant had recently worked with the shelter on providing several of the 200 Thanksgiving Day food baskets distributed to local needy families.

Though businesses sometimes donate food to be served at the shelter, Mont said it was important for this event to be out in the community.

"Well, I felt it would be part of bringing them back into society, in a way," he said.

Some of the residents are nearly out there on their own. Diamond Howard, who started out as a resident in the shelter, now pays a modest rent for her apartment at the Willow House, a Light House housing program for women. She's working at a fast-food restaurant, paying for her utilities and cable and becoming more independent, she said.

"I just think it's so nice what they're doing," Howard said, contemplating a big salad off the menu. "I've gotten a lot out of the Light House."

Lee Madison, who has been staying at the shelter for the past three weeks, said he was overwhelmed with the opportunities the Light House staff has afforded him.

"They are definitely concerned about my well-being," he said.

Battling with a drug addiction, Madison enrolled in a drug rehab program this fall. But after sobering up and completing the program, he found he had nowhere to go. That's when he came to the shelter, he said.

Now Madison is dealing with another obstacle as he tries to make a fresh start and find an employer willing to take a chance on an employee with some blemishes on his record. The economy, he said, is making it even more difficult for him to land a job.

"I've put out so many applications, and I have gotten no calls back," Madison said. "They're getting so many applicants, and if they have a choice, who are they going to go with?"

Madison, who said he has family scattered throughout Anne Arundel County, said he's not sure what his plans will be this holiday. But he feels grateful for what he has now.

"When I saw how much the community gave the shelter for Thanksgiving, just the outpouring and the generosity, I could never in my life say again that people don't care," he said. "People here really do have a concern for others."