

COHASSET MARINER

Cohasset resident provides retail space for nonprofit Community Content



Paul Ognibene and Sasha Purpura.



Pictured from left: Jason Alves, director of the East Cambridge Business Association; Sasha Purpura, executive director of Food For Free; Cambridge Mayor Siddiqui; State Representative Marjorie Decker; vice mayor Alanna Mallon; and Paul Ognibene, CEO of Urban Spaces.

Cohasset resident Paul Ognibene, CEO of Urban Spaces, the Cambridge-based real estate development company, stepped up when the call went out that Food for Free, a Cambridge-based nonprofit, had lost their space.

Ognibene learned of Food For Free's dilemma when Jason Alves, director of the East Cambridge Business Association, reached out to his membership to see if anyone could assist. Ognibene and his team met with Food For Free soon thereafter and, after just a few short meetings, had forged a partnership that provides Food For Free with a new facility.

The new partnership had a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the food packing and distribution center. Located at 73 First Street in Cambridge's First Street Corridor across from the CambridgeSide shopping center, the facility will help Food For Free meet the growing demand for food during the pandemic. Urban Spaces is donating the rent and property management services for the 3,600 square foot facility.

Since the pandemic hit in March, Food For Free had been utilizing the Cambridge Senior Center as a food packing and distribution center. The nonprofit knew that they would need to find another space once winter began in order to make way for the city's seasonal warming center for the homeless.

"Urban Spaces saved us at the last minute," said Sasha Purpura, executive director of Food For Free. "They're not charging us rent, they're not charging us a management fee and it is so significantly below any market rate that all of that money that we'll be saving can go directly to food and to addressing this crisis."

During the ceremony, Purpura told the crowd, which included city of Cambridge Mayor Siddiqui, vice mayor Alanna Mallon, councilors Tim Toomey and Marc McGovern and State Representative Marjorie Decker, as well as team members from Food For Free and Urban Spaces, that the relative increase in food insecurity in Massachusetts is higher than anywhere else in the nation.

"When Jason Alves of our local business association called and explained what Food For Free was all about and what they were looking for, we knew immediately that we wanted to help in any way we could, so we worked everything out in record time," said Ognibene. "This partnership represents the best of the business, government and nonprofit worlds coming together, and it's a great model for community success."

For information, visit <https://foodforfree.org>.