

# Union Carpenters Fight Food Insecurity Building Mama-Tee's Pop-Up Grocery Store

*Neighbors & Union Carpenters Band Together to Eliminate Hunger & Food Shortages*

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, UNITED STATES, June 23, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Union carpenters, including retired members and apprentices, helped to build the [Mama-Tee Pop-Up Grocery](#) during the cold months of January through March.

The Pop-Up grocery celebrated the completion of its mobile store June 12. It is located in the Graduate Hospital neighborhood, near 17th and Montrose streets.

Mama-Tee is a community effort led by women of color, to help reduce hunger in underserved Philadelphia communities.

Various carpenter locals joined the project after recognizing the need and worthiness of Mama-Tee's mission.

"When Mama-Tee approached us, it was immediately clear that helping to build the store would be a boost to the neighborhood for people who didn't have enough food or access to healthy food choices in Philadelphia," said Vic Szwanki, Local 158 and council representative for the Philadelphia-based [Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters](#) (EASRCC).

Szwanki said that during construction, as many as 18 carpenters worked on the project during weekends. "We worked between January and March to complete the project during cold weather and the COVID pandemic," he said. "Our carpenters provided [construction labor for] the flooring, rough framing, windows and door, siding insulation, drywall and helped with the roof. In the end, we provided the organization with a closed shell that was sturdy, expertly built and reliable."



Mama-Tee founder Michelle Nelson, Ph.D.

"We've always thought of union carpenters as being part of their community," said Szwanki. "Mama Tee's is part of that story which includes people taking care of their neighbors. That's why we volunteered. We felt right at home helping our neighbors."

According to Jamal Wells, co-founder, the pop-up grocery store is the main distribution point for this hunger fighting initiative as well as a central hub for its volunteers. Residents can pick up food or drop off a contribution, and there is no cost. Because the store is mobile, the organization hopes they can transport and replenish food items to their 18 separate bright-yellow community refrigerators throughout Philadelphia neighborhoods.

Volunteers run both the pop-up grocery and the community refrigerators, operating under the motto, "Take what you need, leave what you don't."



Mama-Tee Pop-Up Grocery Front Entrance

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*Mama-Tee founder Michelle Nelson, Ph.D.*

Mama-Tee works with nonprofits, restaurants, grocery stores, and individuals by collecting and sharing food before it goes to waste.

"We want to thank The Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters for the skilled labor and experience that they brought to The Mama-Tee Pop-Up Grocery Store project," said Mama-Tee founder Michelle Nelson, Ph.D. "None of us got to where we are alone.

"Whether the assistance we received was obvious or subtle, acknowledging someone's help is a big part of understanding the importance of saying thank you. With many of our neighbors who are faced with food insecurity

in our city, the act of volunteerism bestowed by the men and women of EASRCC is an amazing gift today and for years to come. We are happy to have EASRCC as our neighbor and friend."

The main local food partner for the pop-up grocer is Whole Foods Market, contributing at least 500 pounds of food per month. Other food partners for the pop-up include Sharing Excess and

Hungry Harvest as well as Misfits Market, Share Food Program (Philly) and Riverwards Produce, who contribute regularly to the community fridges.

Individuals and organizations can contribute to The Mama-Tee Pop-Up Grocery Store and the community refrigerators through its Go Fund Me campaign at <https://gofund.me/cc5de728>.

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