

Gourmet giveaway: Every week, the Magic donate food to the underprivileged

By DAVID WHITLEY | SENTINEL STAFF WRITER
November 26, 2008



Carmen Nazario and Wayne Christian pack up left over food at Amway Arena for the homeless during the Orlando Magic's game against the Milwaukee Bucks in Orlando. (GARY W. GREEN, ORLANDO SENTINEL / November 24, 2008)

At 3 p.m. he wound through a quiet neighborhood toward the Attain home. Two dozen clients live there, ranging from age 15 to 81. A few may not be able to tell you the day of the week, but they know when it's Tuesday.

That's when the big truck shows up. Nobody would complain if it was full of day-old sauerbraten.

"The food is awesome," Nichols said. "They have good quality chefs down there."

They also have some quality basketball players. Program coordinator Iman Trower said their next goal is to score some tickets to a game, since many of the clients like to watch the Magic on TV.

But they don't want to seem greedy. The food is more than enough. When some salmon showed up recently, it generated more buzz than [LeBronJames](#). "Most of them had never had it in their lives," Nichols said. There was no salmon on Tuesday. There were braised vegetables, Caesar salad, pasta, ribs, chicken and hot dogs. The pans were gone before the truck even pulled out. "I guarantee, they're already in the oven," Trower said. Not long afterward they were on the dinner table. Nobody would have mistaken it for a night at Blue, but it was definitely a taste of the good life

The white truck backed down a driveway Tuesday afternoon. You could almost taste the anticipation.

Would it bring filet mignon? Bacon-wrapped scallops? Did it really matter? "Believe me, they'll enjoy it," Bill Nichols said. They are the clients with Attain Inc., which runs a home for men and women with developmental disabilities in south Orlando . Eighteen hours earlier the food was being nibbled by people who paid \$800 for the privilege.

Of course, that price included a close-up view of Hedo Turkoglu walking out of the Magic locker room. Now it was being delivered to people who won't make \$800 this year.

What's a veal scaloppini like you doing in a place like this? "Cutting our food budget in half," said Nichols, who works at Attain. He peered under one of the aluminum lids sitting on a picnic table. A gaggle of chicken cordon bleu looked back at him. Food giveaways are common this time of year. The Magic have a handful this week headlined by turkeys, Rashard Lewis, Stan Van Gundy and even Mildred Fernandez.

The pans and bags of high-end chow show up every week at the Attain house. They are the product of **Rock and Wrap It Up!**, a food recovery program that began with rock bands in 1990.

They didn't want their backstage buffets to be tossed after the show. So pretty soon, the homeless started dining on the sushi and green M&Ms left by Crosby, Stills and Nash.

Sports teams started getting involved five years ago. Now the shrimp and sauerbraten that once went in the garbage behind Amway Arena ends up in stomachs around Central Florida.

Especially the sauerbraten.

They tried that dish not too long ago at a Magic game. It clanged off the taste buds like a Dwight Howard free throw.

"We have theme nights sometimes," Daniel Madan said. "I just try to give guests a different dining experience."

He's the executive chef for Orlando Foodservice Partners. Around Amway Arena they just call him Chef Dan. Don't tell a guy who produces up to 2,000 pounds of hot dogs a night that he shouldn't wear a chef's hat.

Besides all the concession food, Madan is in charge of pleasing some very discerning palates at three clubs. When you can pay \$375 to \$800 for a courtside ticket, chances are you can tell gazpacho from vichyssoise.

That money also gains you entry into Blue presented by the Ritz-Carlton Club. Not to take off the ritz, but most people just call it Blue.

Three years ago the Magic turned a storage area into a swanky bar, complete with flat-screen TVs, soft blue lighting and a large black-and-white photo of Frank Sinatra smoking a cigarette.

The real appeal is its location, right across from the Magic locker room. On Monday, Blue patrons got a great view of an injured Jameer Nelson limping by midway through the game against Milwaukee. They also got London broil and braised short ribs, lovingly served by cooks in starched white uniforms.

"I would say it was gourmet," said Dr. Stephen Yandel, a Melbourne oncologist.

"I'd give it an 8 out of 10," said his wife, Barbara. "Only because they have to do mass quantity. But for a basketball arena, it's great."

It's certainly too good to throw away. The Magic started donating all their leftovers to Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida this season. On Monday night there were 13 pans of food and half a London broil.

Madan wheeled them into a freezer, and at 8a.m. Tuesday Jay Hannah pulled up in a refrigerated truck. He'd eventually pick up donations from KFC, Seasons 52, Target, Costco and Longhorn and delivered them to Second Harvest clients.