



Wawa Day: Free coffee, dancing, nearly \$200K for Special Olympics at Hamilton store

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HAMILTON — One by one, customers entered the Wawa looking to grab a free cup of coffee from the back of the Hamilton store.

But between the customers and coffee was an impromptu dance party, with a dozen employees, executives and mascots doing laps in a conga line and performing the "chicken dance" between racks of baked goods and the deli counter.

The Wawa convenience store chain celebrated its 51st anniversary on Thursday by throwing celebrations at one store in each of its six states, designating the tiny Mercer County location on Quakerbridge Road as its New Jersey party center.

On "Wawa Day," the company expects to give away more than 1.5 million free cups of coffee. By 11 a.m., the Quakerbridge Road store had already gone through four times the amount of coffee it usually does daily, general manager Matt Mellott said.

"It's great to connect with the customers and give back to the community," said Mellott, raising a coffee cup in a toast. "We really wanted to say thank you to our customers 1.5 million times over."

Wawa officials said the day is intended to celebrate the relationship formed between Wawa customers and employees.

"Today, we're talking about a lot of millions — millions of dollars donated, millions cups of coffee given away and millions of magical moments we share with each other and our customers," Wawa area manager Kathryn Stevens said.

Throughout the Thursday ceremony, Wawa officials honored 14-year employee Giuseppe Tomasi, who primarily serves as a friendly face stocking the coffee pots each morning at the Quakerbridge Road store.

"The customers come in every morning and want a good day. The first thing you do is smile," Tomasi said. "If you let them see the smile, that's it."

"Wawa Day" also served as a spotlight on the work of the Wawa Foundation, the company's nonprofit that hopes to raise \$50 million for causes involving health, hunger and hometown heroes by 2018.

To the cheers of customers and employees, the company's mascot "Wally," a giant goose, held up a placard announcing that the Wawa Foundation had donated \$10 million to local and national nonprofits.

The foundation raised more than \$1 million in the first quarter of 2015 alone, chairman Jay Culotta said.

At the ceremony, the Special Olympics of New Jersey was awarded a \$197,649 grant.

"Wawa is such a great partner because they're so community oriented," said Special Olympics New Jersey spokeswoman Heather Anderson. "We want our athletes to be part of the communities where they live. They want to play on the fields and be on the courts just like everyone else, and this funding will allow them to do that."

"We believe these programs enrich the health of our communities and consider the athletes and volunteers heroes," Culotta said.

Community Options, Inc., a Princeton-based nonprofit that supports people with disabilities, was also named one of the foundation's local beneficiaries and received a \$2,750 grant.

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