



## Montclairites offer freebies for furloughed workers

**By Jaimie Julia Winters**

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*Local shop owners are giving free deals to furloughed workers.  
Photo by Shanice Garcia*

President Donald Trump and congress may have reached a deal on Friday to reopen the government for the next three weeks, but Montclair business and community members are still offering some relief for government employees who are in day 35 without a paycheck.

Tomorrow, Jan. 26, 2:30 p.m, the First Congregational Church will hold a luncheon for furloughed federal employees at the Guild Room, 40 South Fullerton Ave., Montclair.

## LOCAL DEALS FOR FURLOUGHED WORKERS

- NJ Acupuncture Wellness: Free sessions to workers affected by the shutdown.
- Olsen Reiki, Shiatsu & Massage: Free massages in Montclair. Call Pamela Olsen at 973-393-2135 to book.
- Java Love: Government employees are eligible for free coffee.
- Montclair Art Museum: The museum is open free of charge to workers affected by the shutdown. Workers should present government ID at the entrance.
- Kika Stretch Studios: The studios are offering free stretch sessions to workers affected by the shutdown
- Fred Astaire Upper Montclair: If you've been furloughed or without pay during the shut down, schedule a free introductory dance lesson package 973-783-8999.
- Montclair Bread Company: Free sandwich, bread, coffee for government workers
- Montclair Brewery: Free pint to furloughed government employees
- Little Daisy Bake Shop: Treats from 5 to 6 p.m. on Sunday
- Toni's Kitchen: Offering supermarket gift cards to those with no pay
- East Side Mags: Offering a free comic or graphic novel with a government ID, while supplies last.



Furloughed workers share their stories in

# Montclair of government shutdown



*Furloughed government workers tell their stories at the Montclair Bread Company.  
Photos courtesy Brad Barket*

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Emily is worried about safe drinking water, ocean discharges and Superfund sites while she is furloughed from her job with the Environmental Protection Agency. Mike, who still must show up for his job at Fort Dix prison, said workers there have started food and diaper drives and contacted local food banks for their colleagues who have families to support. Cheryl and Myran work for the IRS and are concerned about their health insurance premiums not getting paid since they are no longer getting paychecks.

They are just a handful of the 8,000 furloughed federal government workers residing in New Jersey, some of whom met at the Montclair Bread Company to share their stories of living without paychecks on Friday, Jan. 18, the 28th day of the government shutdown.

Owner Rachel Wyman hosted the event with Sen. Robert Menendez.

“We feel helpless in what we can do to make changes to the government. We can only bake,” she said.

A day earlier, Wyman delivered 500 donuts and cups of coffee to TSA workers who are working without pay at Newark Airport.

Coast Guard families, IRS and EPA employees, and air traffic controllers gathered at the cafe that has been providing loaves of bread, coffee and sandwiches to furloughed families.

Menendez said the government workers were “hostages” for President Trump’s demand to build a border wall with Mexico. “But their [department’s] funding is not in question,” Menendez added, pointing to the group of government workers in the cafe.



*IRS, EPA, TSA and federal prison workers discuss the impact of the government shutdown on their departments.*

Muier works for the Food and Drug Administration, which is not conducting safety inspections at this point. He is responsible for implementation of ethics, specifically the Hatch Act, which precludes government workers from being involved in partisan politics.

“The irony is, it’s partisan politics that impacting us and keeping us from making a living,” he said.

Mike said as the days drag on without prison workers getting paid, they will have to decide whether to pay for gas to get to work, or pay for food for their families.

A group of mothers with children in the Coast Guard said the shutdown is having a ripple effect as their families will have to step up to pay the bills as their children work without pay.

Menendez referred to legislation that would require pay for workers who have to show up for work in the event of a future furlough. For now he is approaching financial institutions to waive penalties and credit reportings of government workers during the shutdown. According to SmartAsset.com, of the Americans who have savings accounts, the median savings account balance is \$5,200.



*A group of Coast Guard mothers discuss how the shutdown is affecting their children.*

## Local resources

Toni’s Kitchen has had only one direct request for a furloughed worker to provide food for the family. The group has seen a slight increase in backpack donations that are filled with nutritional snacks and are given out

to students. It also is serving more free lunches, said Anne Mernin.

“We are happy to provide food for any furloughed workers if they run into any additional needs,” she said.

At the Salvation Army, workers were happy with the news that SNAP benefits and the Food Stamp program had reinstated benefits through February. New Jersey has about 730,000 SNAP recipients.

But new families in need of assistance won't be able to apply. Business manager Michelle Kroeze said they are concerned with their grant funding that is used for rental assistance.

Both groups are taking monetary donations, and Kroeze said donations of supermarket gift cards are appreciated.

Furloughed federal employees assigned to work in New Jersey are eligible to apply for unemployment benefits.

Benefits are being paid to eligible federal workers beginning Dec. 23, 2018. Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo said eligible employees would be paid for the duration of the shutdown, no matter how far into the shutdown their unemployment claim is filed. But applications are taking up to five weeks to process.

The maximum weekly unemployment benefit for 2019 is \$696. Regular benefits are exhausted after 26 weeks.

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