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WEST VANCOUVER, British Columbia – Taste of Thanksgiving and Taste of the Holidays are two recent events held at Whole Foods Market here to raise awareness for the store's products and to raise money for charity.

“These events kick off the holiday celebrations in our store and show people what we're proud of,” said Denise Breyley, associate store team leader. “It also gives our guests an opportunity to taste the foods as they move through the store. It's like a cocktail party.”

The events were held from 5 to 8 p.m., one evening each in October and December. They attracted 200 to 300 attendees, who could taste food from 14 stations throughout the store. Guests paid \$15, which allowed them one taste per station. Each portion was a good size, rather than a 2-ounce sample plate, said Breyley.

Event attendees mingled with regular shoppers, but were distinguished by a “passport” to each station, which elevated the evening to an event, rather than a regular in-store tasting. “It helps people realize it's special,” explained Breyley. A band played during the event to add to the ambiance.

All of the store's departments had at least one station, depending on how many items they wanted to showcase. At Taste of Thanksgiving, held in October for Canadian Thanksgiving, the food included lobster bisque in the store's seafood department; an entire Thanksgiving meal in prepared foods; and a selection of locally grown apples paired with a made-in-store caramel in the produce department.

Taste of the Holidays, held this past weekend, focused on entertaining and featured organic turkey and Blue Goose New York strip steak in the meat department; crab cakes and smoked salmon salad in seafood; spinach and citrus salad in produce; and tandoori vegetable samosas and spiral-cut ham on a petite baguette in prepared foods.

A total of \$5,000 was donated to charity from the Thanksgiving event; Whole Foods made up the difference once attendees' money had been collected.

The proceeds were donated to The Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project, a grassroots organization that grows and harvests food to give to food banks.

Money from the Holidays event, which had not been tallied at press time, will be donated to the North Shore Crisis Services Society, which provides help, such as counseling, for women and children. Last year, money was donated to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

“These events give the charities an opportunity to share information with our customers,” said Breyley.

Whole Foods markets the events in the store for three to four weeks before they are held, as well as on its website and in a local newspaper advertisement. The featured charity also publicizes the

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events to its membership during this time, she said.

This was the third year the events were held, and it won't be the last, said Breyley. Other events during the year are tied to different holidays and changing seasons, or highlight local producers, but these are the only two events whose proceeds are donated to charity.

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