



DON PIGNATARO

Executive Director, Holiday Express

With a business and finance degree from Mount Saint Mary's College, Don Pignataro had a career in the corporate sector when his exposure and interactions with social service agencies caused him to re-evaluate the course of his life. While employed as a Credit and Collections manager for New Jersey Natural Gas, Don interfaced with several county and state agencies that assisted low-income customers with their utility bill payments. Don worked to help educate those customers as to what additional services, beyond their utility bill payments, were available to them and how to obtain broader assistance. The experience opened his eyes to the scope of issues that people with limited means face and prompted him to explore volunteer work.

Don knew Tim McLoone for many years through mutual acquaintances and was aware of Holiday Express. In 2002, Don decided to experience Holiday Express first-hand. He volunteered for an event at Paterson-based Eva's Village, a comprehensive social service agency that feeds the hungry, provides health care to the poor, treats addiction and serves literally hundreds of people from all walks of life. Don was moved at the level of gratitude expressed by Eva's clients to Holiday Express volunteers. Though Don may not have realized it at the time, that moment became a turning point in his life.

Don continued on the corporate track, working as vice president of Operations for Servall Paper Products. However, he remained committed to volunteer work, including holding a variety of voluntary leadership positions with the United Way of Monmouth County.

Meanwhile, he became increasingly involved with Holiday Express. In 2005, he agreed to manage the warehouse, organizing donations and coordinating the activities of volunteers who assemble gift bags for clients. He did just about anything that was needed to ensure that the gift bags arrived safely and on time from the warehouse to the event.

Simultaneously, Holiday Express was growing beyond Tim's initial vision. To manage this growth responsibly and effectively, Tim and the Board of Trustees understood that an additional employee would be needed to complement the lone existing staff position and to provide a true value to the organization and its supporters. They asked Don to assume the newly-created position of executive director. To Don, this wasn't like any other job offer in his career. He viewed it as a chance to complete his transition from the corporate world to the non-profit sector; and, in the process, to make an even greater difference in the lives of those in need. In accepting the offer, Don pledged to expand Holiday Express's charitable reach.

In his free time, Don says he attempts to play golf, softball and basketball "without injury." In addition, this former coach of several youth sports teams now enjoys cheering from the sidelines when his children, Michael and Gregory, participate in athletic events. Don has also turned Holiday Express into a family affair, recruiting his sons as warehouse volunteers and bringing his wife and sons along at the St. John's Soup Kitchen and Trinity Church events in recent years.