



Volunteers *Delivering the Gift of Human Kindness*

Holiday Express Yearbook

Season 2006

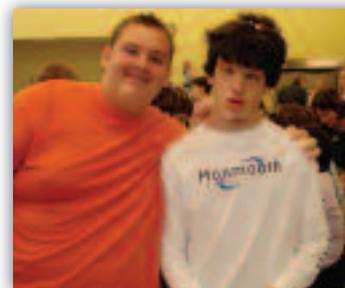


A Season to Remember

Each year the Holiday Express community finds new and better ways to fulfill its unchanging mission: to serve those with the greatest need for the gift of human kindness. With a fresh crop of new volunteers and the experience of seasoned veterans, the 2006 season had a number of notable points.

The warehouse is where the buzz begins each season. From organizing thousands of donations to carrying out administrative duties, there's something going on year-round. When autumn returns, the elves kick in to high gear. This season they worked tirelessly to pack over 14,000 gift bags. Gift bags often include blankets to help keep the homeless warm or keep those in wheelchairs covered while being transported. Thanks to the efforts of local schools, scouts church groups, businesses, media and generous individuals, almost 2,000 blankets were donated. Additionally, Brian Pasch, Sickles Market Wine and Cheese Tasting honoree, encouraged those visiting his website to make donations to Holiday Express for the purpose of purchasing blankets. Visitors to his website contributed over \$4,000, and we were able to purchase another 1,300 blankets. These donations served to augment the 8,000 blankets donated by our friends at Berkshire Blankets, most of which were given away during the season.

The Dinner Dance committee, chaired by Rick Wilgerodt, once again produced a spectacular event that was attended by 400 guests. Big Joe Henry from NJ 101.5 served as Master of Ceremonies for an evening of song, scholarships, charity auctions and holiday cheer that kicked off the season and brought needed funds for operational costs.



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Just before the start of the 2006 Holiday Express season, as most of you by now already know, Beth and I learned that our son, Jack, has leukemia. We soon also learned that we have a support system that extends far beyond our immediate family and that, of course, is all of you. Your unrelenting good wishes, small deeds of kindness, and offerings of prayers (in all religions) were nothing short of overwhelming. Of course, the irony of our situation also wasn't lost on us. After all, haven't we spent the last fifteen years ministering to these very same children and their caretakers and families? Didn't that give us the right to believe this couldn't happen to us? Well, of course not.

Our experience has reminded me yet again of two very important things: One, we are so very fortunate to have that "support system" I spoke of and we can't imagine how we could endure this journey without it. And, yet, most of the people we see each year have only the smallest fraction of that support if they have any at all, and must persevere mostly on their own. I truly don't know how they do it. Two, all of you reading this have your own difficult situations. This just happens to be our turn, but we know we're not dealing with it alone and for that, we are incredibly grateful to all of you.

Oh, and one more thing. Over the next three years, Jack's treatment will most likely cost in the millions of dollars. We are most fortunate to have excellent insurance (our good friends and Holiday Express supporters at Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield) that has enabled us to access the very best care available for our boy.

But so many people in this country do not have insurance of any type and that is just wrong. We should demand better of our leaders.

Thanks,



Donald Pignataro, Executive Director

We call them events. We do a lot of things to complete an event. We develop a bus schedule and a truck schedule. We make phone calls and send many emails. We coordinate, assemble, label – we load and unload. We sing, we dance, we clap. We plan and execute. What we ultimately do, is bring joy to people. Individuals, they have the standard labels, disabled, homeless, sick and other clinical or legal terms that mean something when filling out a form. Individuals, they are the reason Holiday Express exists.



Special individuals get the opportunity to see a professional, live band thanks to generous supporters and hundreds of volunteers. They get a holiday party and socialize in a way their daily lives don't normally allow. Our volunteers are outstanding, committed and gifted with a compassion to help those in need. There is an intangible something that draws people, many diverse people, to this organization. Holiday Express the band, the charity, the non-profit organization, is a conduit. We perform at places, we connect people. The most important aspect of this organization is not what we do, it is who benefits from what we do. A most sincere thank you to all for giving so much of yourself.

It is the mission of Holiday Express to deliver music, food, gifts, financial support and friendship to those with the greatest need for the gift of human kindness during the holiday season and throughout the year.

Newsletter Committee

Layonne Holmes – Editor

Barbara Willis – Contributing Writer

Graphic Design by Jill Weiss

Photos by Scott Longfield, Jill Weiss and HolEx friends

Holiday Express is a volunteer, non-profit, non-sectarian, registered 501(c)(3) organization.

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Contact Information

968 Shrewsbury Ave., Tinton Falls, NJ 07724

Tel: (732) 544-8010 Fax: (732) 544-8020

email: holexpress@comcast.net

<http://www.holidayexpress.org>



A Season to Remember

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Connections are made wherever Holiday Express visits, and effort is made to reach out to new locations. Added to the roster this year were the Children's Center of Monmouth County in Neptune and The School for Children in Eatontown. Both day schools for students with multiple disabilities and autism proved to be a great match. Also added was Catholic Charities of East Brunswick, which offers outreach to community members in just about any type of need; in New York City, Friends House, a residence for those living with HIV/AIDS, proved to be a new friend of the Holiday Express family.



For the first time, volunteers split into two groups on Christmas Eve in order to visit Trinity Church Soup Kitchen in Asbury Park as well as St. John's Soup Kitchen in Newark. To top it off, a troupe of volunteers rapidly prepared two surprise visits to Monmouth Medical Center's Psychiatric Wards, and made sure that every bit of the holiday experience was given to the patients and staff. These are just a few examples of how skilled and dedicated the "elves" have become at serving up the merriest holiday party around.



Last summer the Annual Holiday Express Golf Classic at Manasquan River Golf Club included 120 golfers and raised over \$33K. This year's 5th Anniversary event is scheduled for July 23, 2007, and will again benefit the scholarship fund. Holiday Express donated nearly \$60,000 to 12 students continuing their higher education in 2006.



From all of us at
Holiday Express,
Thank You
for supporting our Mission

Holiday Express 2006 Season

S P O N S O R S

*Special thanks to our Sponsors and Patrons
for their generous support of Holiday Express and the clients we serve.*

Golf Classic July 24, 2006

Presenting Sponsor
NetJets

Red Bank Tree Lighting November 24, 2006

Stage Sponsor
Shore Point Distributors & Coors Light

New Jersey Performing Arts Center

Holiday Express Benefit Concert
December 7, 2006

Presenting Sponsor
Wachovia

Santa Sponsor
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Stage Sponsor
Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield
Sound & Light Sponsors
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Jackson Hewitt

McWilliams Forge & Company
Rider Insurance Company
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Curtain Sponsors

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Garden State Check Cashing
Maher Terminals, Inc.
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Patrons

Architectural Window Manufacturing
County Concrete Corporation
Crisdel Group, Inc.
Dimensional Merchandising, Inc.

Eastern Fish
Fisk Alloy Wire, Inc.
Janome America, Inc.
Liberty Travel, Inc.
McGuggan L.L.C.
Metropolitan Trucking
Midstate Lumber
North Jersey Media
RoNetco Supermarkets, Inc.
The Walter R. Earle Corporation
Village Super Market, Inc.
York Insurance Services Group
Holiday Express Benefit Concert

Count Basie Theatre

Holiday Express Benefit Concert
December 19, 2006

Presenting Sponsor
K. Hovnanian Homes

Curtain Sponsors

Birdsall Services Group, Inc.
Circle BMW

Count Basie Theatre

Holiday Express Benefit Concert
December 21, 2006

Presenting Sponsor
Verizon

Stage Sponsor
Donjon Marine Co., Inc.

Holiday Express Performance at Blythedale Children's Hospital

December 21, 2006

New York Mercantile Exchange

Filming of the Holiday Express Christmas Spectacular

December 19, 2006

Perricone Family Charitable Trust

GIVING PARTNERS

**Number of organizations
with wish lists: 44**

**Number of organizations with
giving partners to date: 39**

**Total number of
Giving Partners: 29**

New Giving Partners: 4

GIFTS GIVEN

Fax Machine
Tetherball set
Developmental Trike
DVD Players and DVDs
20 watches
Ping Pong Table
Digital Camera and Printing Dock
4 Rocking Chairs
2 Computers
Reflection Bench
Projection Screen
All in One Printer
Scanner, Fax and Copier
Karaoke machine
Ice Cream Maker
Gift Certificates to restaurants,
grocery stores, crafts stores
and Home Depot
Winter Coats
Dictionaries
Software
Microwave
Tickets to Radio City Christmas Spectacular
Tickets to Count Basie
Holiday Express Show
Smart Board Interactive White Board
Electric Guitar and Amp
Colanders
Steam Tables
Cutting Boards
Floor Hockey Helmets
Softballs, bats and bag
Board games
Put 'em rounds furniture
for handicapped children
Novels on CD ROMs
\$5200 in checks
Blankets
Pillows
Bedding
Towels
Laundry bags
Wallets
Underwear
Dishes
Shower Curtains

S T A T I S T I C S

50 Events in 39 Days

TOTAL GIFT BAGS: 14,122

Total for Events: 12,632, Additional: 1,490

BREAKDOWN OF BAGS

5,580 Men's Bags, 3,480 Women's Bags, 1,969 Unisex Bags
1,793 Children's Bags, 1,300 Toys

All packed by the dedicated morning "Elves" as well as the 250 + Jr. Volunteers.

A lot of the Jr. Volunteers came back time after time.

20 scout groups

72 kids one day (setting a new record)

Candy that filled over 20 garbage cans and bins

BLANKETS/THROWS donated to Holiday Express

10,000 TOTAL

8,000 – Berkshire Blankets, 1000 donated by individuals and families

1000 from schools, church groups, scout troops, offices

7000 BLANKETS/THROWS donated to individuals at events

SPECIAL SUPPORTERS

Sickles Market
Red Bank Rotary
Jersey Mike's Subs
Paras, Apy & Reiss
Whole Foods
Panera Bread

Giving Partner Program

One of the hallmarks of Holiday Express is its ever-expanding "Giving Partner Program." This Program matches Holiday Express donors with specific charitable organizations so the needs of these charities can best be served.

The Giving Partner Program is designed to provide a charity with items it needs, but is often unable to acquire. By requesting that each charity provide a "wish list," Holiday Express is able to find an appropriate donor or donors to fulfill the wish list. This matching of donors with charities forges a relationship between the charitable organizations and the benefactors that support them, making them true "partners" in the program.

Giving Partners are not only large and small businesses, but also private citizens. In fact, half of the donations made through the Giving Partner Program come from individuals and families.

If you would like to become involved with Holiday Express as a Giving Partner, please email Holiday Express at holidayexpress@comcast.net or call (732) 544-8010. Thank you.

AG Edwards Champions Eva's Village

by Tony Perruso

After several years of leaving the office during the busy year-end holiday season with only my gig bag and red Holiday Express t-shirt, several of my co-workers, including the Branch Manager, Fred Ecker, wondered where I went and what I was doing. Since words can't really express what goes on at one of our Holiday Express "revival" events, I offered to bring them along. We all know that after participating once with Holiday Express, life changes forever. Then, along came Eva's Village... the entire office got involved. Now our staff, family, and friends are dedicated to the event. We've already put in our request (begged) to Peg Ford for Eva's Village again next year!

The annual event with Eva's Village symbolizes the beginning of the holiday season here at the Rockaway branch of AG Edwards. We're a different kind of investment firm. Our culture and our mission statement promote family values and a client-first attitude. We embrace those qualities. Our families learn and experience the importance of giving to others, first hand. We are able to participate and celebrate directly with the families at Eva's Village, and see the impact of our efforts.

The giving goes beyond our 40-member staff. We start our preparations for the Holiday Express party several months in

What better way is there to kick off the holiday season for AG Edwards' Tony Perruso and his coworkers than by hosting a Giving Party with Holiday Express!



Sister Gloria Perez, Executive Director, known to Holiday Express as the heart of Eva's Village.



advance. Sending e-mails and notices around the office with the date, wish list and sign-up sheets included. All are welcome to participate and it becomes a complete branch effort. Some members donate, others organize. We have shopping tours and car-pool captains. The feeling of giving becomes infectious, so much so that many of our vendors and clients become a part of the festivities. As the party date gets closer, our lobby begins to show visible signs of our intentions. We begin to stockpile the gifts where our stock market and economic research literature once took center stage. As the pile gets larger and takes up more of lobby, the feeling of giving and joy that only the holidays can bring takes up more of our thoughts and actions. Thoughts not just for Eva's Village and Holiday Express, but for our very own families and friends. At a time when year-end portfolio reviews and economic forecasts get us all a little crazy, the singing, the joy and the smiles on the faces at Eva's keep the promise of the season alive and well.

Thank you for letting us participate with Holiday Express, and allowing us to help make a difference.



Holiday Express Scholarships

Investing in the Future

Did you know that Holiday Express has awarded scholarships each year since 2000? Through generous donations, and annual events such as the Golf Classic, deserving students have the opportunity to apply for several awards. Over \$200,000 has been awarded to date, nearly \$60,000 of it in 2006. Currently 12 students meeting the requirements of character and financial need are continuing their higher education with this aid. We're so proud of these students, some of whom are listed below, for their tenacity and optimism. If you'd like to learn more about our scholarship programs, please visit our website.

Kristen Baldino

*High School/Year Graduated:
Collier High School, 2004*

*Scholarship Received:
Little Steven Scholarship*

*College/Major/Year: Brookdale
Community College, Nursing, Junior*

The Holiday Express Scholarship has given me the chance to go to college full-time. Because of this support, I will hopefully be entering the nursing program this fall. I can't wait to finally be able to work hands-on with patients. I am very thankful. Because of you I am able to focus completely on schoolwork without worrying about how I will make payments.

Sylvana Beverette

*High School/Year Graduated:
Academy Charter High School, 2004*

*Scholarship Received:
Andrew Spencer Award*

*College/Major/Year:
Montclair State University,
Nutrition and Food Science, Junior*

The scholarship from Holiday Express has not only helped me, it also has helped my family. The scholarship has relieved some of the financial burden from my mother and is a big help to me, because it was a resource that kept me in college.

My major is Nutrition and Food Science with a concentration in Food Management. I would recommend college to all, because not only do you secure your future in the workplace, you create a lot of networks. I have met lifelong friends from all over the world. Thank you Holiday Express.

James Donovan

*High School/Year Graduated:
Collier High School, 2006*

*Scholarship Received:
Lauren Townsend Scholarship*

*College/Major/Year:
New York University, Studio Art, Freshman*

The scholarship I received from Holiday Express has relieved an enormous financial stress for my family and me. I remember my mother crying when my name was announced for the award.

I can honestly say that this year has been one of my best. I have learned, loved, and experienced so much more than I could have conceived a year ago. I am truly honored by the opportunity to study at one of the best institutions in the world, in one of the best cities in the world. I cannot thank Mrs. Townsend (Dawn Anna), Holiday Express, my family, and Collier High School enough for everything they have given me.

Shaquita Fogg

*High School/Year Graduated:
Academy Charter High School, 2005*

*Scholarship Received:
Andrew Spencer Award*

*College/Major/Year: North Carolina
Agricultural & Technical State University,
Chemical Engineering, Sophomore*

The scholarship that I received has helped me tremendously in my first two years of school. Without this scholarship, it would have been extremely difficult to attend college and pursue my degree in Chemical Engineering. My college experience so far has been great and I expect it to get better. Because of my scholarship, I have been able to focus on my studies to achieve my goal of getting my degree. It has been challenging but at the same time very rewarding.

The rewards have been numerous. First and foremost, being awarded a scholarship from Holiday Express to pursue my degree. I was also named an INROADS scholar, which led to an opportunity to intern at National Starch & Chemical Company this past summer. Overall, college has been a super experience that I could never have imagined. My gratitude goes to Holiday Express.

Jonathan Kovacs

*High School /Year Graduated:
Collier High School, 2004*

*Scholarship Received:
Little Steven Scholarship*

*College/Major/Year:
Berklee College of Music,
Music Business Management, Junior*

The Little Steven scholarship has helped my family and me a great deal with the enormous cost of attending an excellent school such as Berklee. I am currently in my third year at the school, and I can feel my musical horizons (and academic) expanding every semester. I declared my major as Music Business Management, as well as



performance on my primary instrument and lifelong best friend, my guitar. I am happier at Berklee than I could have been at any other school. It has its ups and downs, but as a musician, I couldn't ask for anything more from a school.

David Patrusevich

High School/Year Graduated:
Collier High School, 2003

Scholarship Received:
Lauren Townsend Scholarship

College/Major/Year:
Delaware Valley College/Biology/Senior

The Lauren Townsend Scholarship has allowed me the chance to attend a four-year college with an excellent science program; and, in turn, it led me closer to obtaining a job in the field of zoology (my major is biology, zoology specialization). Going to college was the best decision I ever made. Without college, my chances of getting a decent-paying and desirable job were slim. Thanks to the encouragement of my high school teachers and staff, and then from the staff of Delaware Valley College and Holiday Express, I was able to make a college education a reality.

Living at college helped me to become a more independent and confident person. It enabled me to meet so many interesting people and make very good friends.

In December of this year I will be graduating and so I will be seeking employment after my degree is completed. My original goal upon entering college was to go on to graduate school, and while I still intend to do so, at the moment I'm more interested in gaining experience in my field. It is unlikely I could have had many of the experiences I've had in the past four years without college, so I consider myself very fortunate for being given the opportunity.

Rachel Krupnick

High School/Year Graduated:
Collier High School, 2003

Scholarship Received:
Little Steven Scholarship

College/Major/Year:
Rowan University, Theatre,
Senior graduating, May 2007

The scholarship has helped me immensely. It has helped take the burden of paying for college off my shoulders as well as my parents. The scholarship has helped me so I don't have to constantly worry about where my tuition money is coming from as many of my peers do. My college experience has been fun, scary, educational and mind-blowing, as well as many other things. I am so glad I went to college. I learned so much about myself and what I want to do with my life. I also obviously learned math and science and my major – theatre, but I think my self-growth is more important and more valuable than any knowledge a textbook could have given me. I am currently applying to graduate schools. I intend on going into a program which will lead to a Master of Fine Arts degree in Costume Design/Technology. I want to further my education and hope to eventually become a university professor and help inspire others as my teachers have inspired me. Thank you!

Ashley Marinaccio

High School/Year Graduated:
Red Bank Regional High School, 2003

Scholarship Received:
Little Steven Scholarship

College/Major/Year:
Pace University, Theatre and
Sociology/Anthropology, Senior

The scholarship I received has given me the opportunity to study abroad and participate in other extracurricular activities

in and around NYC that I wouldn't otherwise have been able to do. I am sincerely grateful for the support Holiday Express has provided for me throughout these past four years. I'm currently applying for the Performance Studies MA at NYU. Having an eclectic range of interests, I double majored in theatre directing and sociology/anthropology while taking on dual minors in Middle Eastern and Women/Gender studies at Pace University.

In January 2005, I spent a month in South Africa studying the affect that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is having on South African theatre. I created a documentary theatre piece based on my interviews with both HIV positive South Africans and New Yorkers. I am the founder of Pace CARES, an HIV/AIDS awareness organization on campus at Pace University. Pace CARES works with HIV/AIDS affiliated groups throughout New York City, providing volunteers, raising money, working directly with patients and members of the community on HIV/AIDS and safer-sex consciousness. Pace CARES specializes in using the theatre as an important tool HIV/AIDS education.

After graduation, I want to start a not-for-profit organization that empowers children in refugee camps through performance and theatre. I am also interested in delving into the world of documentary theatre and performance art by developing and editing new plays surrounding pressing social themes. I plan on continuing my education and applying to a PhD program in Performance Studies. I want my practical work in the field to lead me to teaching on a university level and inspiring a new generation of students to continue groundbreaking work in political and documentary theatre. I feel that the NYU Performance Studies Program is best suited for my eclectic interests and will best prepare me for fighting for what is right and fair, risking for that which mattered and giving help to those in need.

Scholarship Committee (left to right): Rick Brunermer, Chairperson; Joe Petillo; Marilee Celestino; Kim Guadagno; Jim Celestino (Liaison, Board of Trustees); Amy Robinson (Director of Operations)



A Life Devoted to Others



Mary Robinson

by Barbara Willis

The decorations and costumes are packed away following another successful Holiday Express season, but the memory remains of countless “connections” between volunteers and clients. There’s no denying that Holiday Express would be nothing more than a great concept if it were not for the hundreds of men, women and junior volunteers who give selflessly to cheer others.

Holiday Express founder and president, Tim McLoone, didn’t have to look far from home for an exemplary volunteer role model in his mother-in-law, Mary T. Robinson (1930-2002). Her community contributions inspired the creation of the Mary T. Robinson Award, an annual honor bestowed on individuals or companies that have gone the extra mile to advance the mission of Holiday Express.

A glimpse into Mary T. Robinson’s life follows.

Volunteers come in several varieties. There are those good souls who help out when they can, but whose voluntary commitment is limited due to personal or professional constraints. There are others who passionately focus on their charity of choice. And then there was Mary T. Robinson, a volunteer who, by example, showed how a single individual with a higher purpose can accomplish extraordinary things.

Mary and husband Frank, Sr. (who passed away in 1994) raised 11 children. Since Frank worked long hours in New York City, Mary was largely responsible for managing the bustling household. Despite what could be described as the equivalent of two full-time jobs, she always found time to do volunteer work daily, sometimes for a number of organizations simultaneously.

“When I was a child,” says Margaret Gilbertson, “I remember my mom being a volunteer for a charity called F.I.S.H., which stands for ‘For I Shall Help.’ She provided transportation for people who were infirm, often with little Amy in tow.”

Amy Robinson, the youngest of the clan, was about four years old at the time, but vividly remembers accompanying her mom on these excursions. “The experience helped me to be respectful of the elderly, because many of the people she drove around were older.”

Trish Reiss recalls another of her mom’s passionate causes. “Mom was one of the founding members of the Red Bank chapter of Birthright, an organization that helps unwed mothers with bills, clothing and medical care. Mom wanted these women and girls to know there were alternatives to abortion, but she also would listen and offer any help she could without telling them what to do.”

Mary was also a fixture at her children’s schools: St. James Grammar School and Red Bank Catholic. She helped in the library, sold pretzels in the cafeteria and was a member of the PTA.

“How did she do it all?” wonders Amy. Some might also wonder why she did it when she clearly had her hands more than full at home.

Mary E. Robinson, the first child born to Mary T., says that her mom’s role model was John F. Kennedy’s mother, Rose, who was very involved in the community.

Amy adds, “I think she just loved meeting all kinds of people. She loved children, obviously, and I think that’s why she got so involved with both schools.”

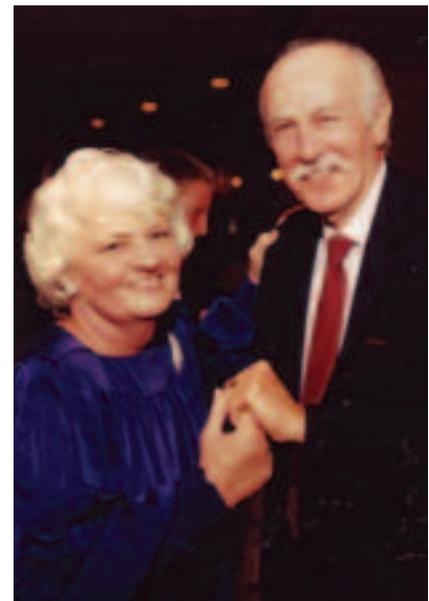
However, Mary’s charitable roots may have stemmed from her own humble beginnings as one of nine children in a financially-strapped family during the Great Depression. Richard Robinson suspects that “she probably wanted to give to others what she might not have had as a child.”

Frank, Jr. agrees. “Those struggles instilled in her a sense that as her life improved, she had to give something back. Her strong belief in the teachings of the Catholic Church also led her to perform works of mercy.”

Mary also showed mercy to her children when doling out her easy-going brand of discipline. According to Ann Robinson, “My mom was always very patient. She rarely lost her temper. I don’t know how she managed it with so many wild children running around.”

All of the Robinsons refer to their mom as a mentor and role model. Beth says, “We never really had a discussion about volunteering. We just witnessed all the sacrifices she made.” Margaret adds, “My mom had a subtle way of inspiring us when it came to volunteering. She never forced us to get involved, but rather gave us her example to follow.”

And follow they did. The Robinsons collected money for UNICEF on Halloween. Additionally, Ann recounts how





Just Shy of a Dozen

Frank and Mary T. Robynson must have believed in the saying, "the more, the merrier."

According to Beth Robynson McLoone, it was a very merry environment with "something fun always going on." Margaret Gilbertson reflects that "mom and dad somehow made raising 11 children seem relatively easy."

However easy or hard the task actually may have been, Frank Jr. says that "mom had a great sense of faith, family and fun" – even while managing so many rambunctious youngsters in an environment he calls "organized chaos."

Below are the names of the Robynson clan, from oldest to youngest.

Mary (named for her mother)	Richard
Frank, Jr.	Margaret
John	Trish
Ann	Beth
Ned (who passed away in 1995)	Amy
Kathleen	

Left row going up: Mary T., Mary E., John, Ann, Ned, Richard
Right row going up: Frank, Jr., Kathleen, Margaret, Trish, Beth, Amy

she participated in the "Walk for Mankind" while in high school, completing a 21-mile course to raise funds for a group called Project Concern. Mary E. describes her service as a hospital volunteer during grammar and high school "wearing a lovely pink and white pinafore and cap."

Then there were the family projects. Richard remembers everyone pitching in to help with relief efforts for the families flooded in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania in the early 70s. Kathleen and Trish speak about how the girls all put on a carnival to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association. "It was a fun time for the kids in the neighborhood; and, at the same time, we raised money for an important cause," says Trish. "I remember feeling great about doing something positive for others."

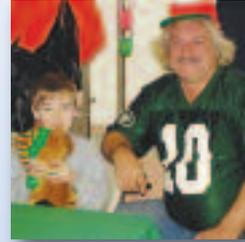
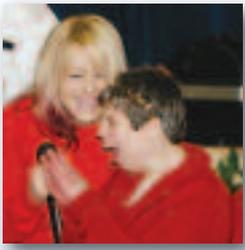
Though her deteriorating health prevented her from attending Holiday Express events, Mary was nonetheless active behind the scenes and, according to Amy, "was proud of the work we all do for Holiday Express."

When asked if the Robynsons are carrying on their mom's legacy through their charitable activities, Trish says that it would be tough for her or any one of her siblings to carry on her mom's extraordinary legacy alone. "But I do think all of us together are carrying it on."

And that's a fitting tribute to an amazing woman.

Back row: Trish, Mary T., Mary E., Margaret, Ann, Beth Amy, Kathleen
Front row: Richard, John, Frank, Jr.

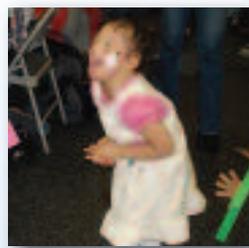




It is the mission of Holiday E xpress to deliver music, food, gifts, financial support and friendship to those with the

SEASON
2006





to those with the greatest need for the gift of human kindness during the holiday season and throughout the year.



Perceptions

"First-Time" Stories – Volunteers, Events and Event Managers



Holiday Express would not be able to exist without its more than 500 volunteers. These dedicated and talented people come together every holiday season to sing a song, help push a wheelchair, paint a face, play a guitar, pack a gift bag, wear an elf costume, pack a truck, hold a hand and so much more to the people that we visit.

As I prepare to put together our season each year, I read through the many letters requesting a visit from Holiday Express. It is always very difficult not to say "yes" to everyone but we only have 30 days between Thanksgiving and Christmas!

We traveled to some really wonderful new places this past season and made some great new friends! Our new destinations took us to an AIDS hospice, a soup kitchen, schools for children with special needs, and a psychiatric ward. As always, our volunteers took on these new challenges without blinking an eye. One of these challenges is the role of Event Manager, arranging the details that go into an event. These details include: arranging the number of gift bags needed, assigning specific tasks to the volunteers, coordinating food and beverages, crafts and face painting, ensuring the truck and bus have directions to the venue and much more.

We had a few new Event Managers and Assistant Event Managers take on these challenges this year; namely Jill Gemmel, Tricia Rumola, Dianne Meserlin, Sue Ralph, Tara Demyanovich, Lynne Broza, Carol Egan, Tony Cosentino, Trish Spahr, Dawn Walsh and Don Pignataro. A big thank you to all of the Event Managers and Assistant Event Managers for all the hard work and dedication they put into this very important job.

Amy Robinson, Director of Operations

Monmouth Medical Center's Psychiatric Units

Story by Maureen King



It was just a week before Christmas and the morning elves and I were busy packing gift bags at the Holiday Express Warehouse. Amy Robinson walked over and asked me if I would like to join a small group of volunteers doing a first-time event at Monmouth Medical Center's Children's Psychiatric Unit – to help entertain the children.

After passing through security measures, we entered a large room where the party

was just getting started. As the children filed in, they were delighted to see the Grinch, Elmo, Rudolf and the Holiday Express Elves, along with Santa and Mrs. Claus. We danced and sang along to the music from the new stereo system we brought along to donate; and judging by the squeals and laughter, I'd say everyone was having a wonderful time.

During the visit, each child had a chance to be seated between Santa and Mrs. Claus for a holiday picture. Santa, with his Elves at his side, handed each child presents, including a stuffed animal and a soft fleece blanket. The children's unit also received a big screen TV, a Foosball table and lots of holiday cheer.

We went back at the hospital a few days later, ready to make some memories on two separate floors this time. Each floor received a new microwave and stereo system and everyone received soft fleece blankets.

As I walked out of the unit, I couldn't help but look back at those locked steel doors thinking of the patients I had left behind. Our mission was to bring a little happiness to their lives, if only for a short while. I truly hope the memories of that day will last a lot longer. I know they will for me.

School for Children

Story by Tara Demyanovich



Over 20 years ago I became a nurse because I truly enjoyed helping others. I also love planning anything that has to do with a party, so this year my sister Jeanne, knowing both, nudged me to try event managing a Holiday Express show. She had all faith in her big sis, but in my mind I was saying, "What the heck do I know? Over the years I just face painted at a few shows and enjoyed the music and singing." Well I signed up for Make-A-Wish as an assistant to Helen, and was shown the ropes by one of the best. That show was a big hit!

Two weeks later, it was my turn to fly with the School for Children event. I had Ann with me, and just knowing this kept me relaxed while preparing for this first-time event. My only concern was that all would happen as it should; but when the day came, I was pleasantly surprised! All fell into place just as Amy and Ann assured me it would. Donna was "back stage" and all about in the crowd, guiding all elves and characters. It was amazing to see how every volunteer knew exactly what to do without me saying a word. They were fabulous! At that moment I felt proud to be a part of such a wonderful organization.

The best part for me was to actually absorb the entire party at once. Every smile, giggle, and dance brought so much joy to my heart. Being able to share the experience with my family members who were out working the crowd was an added bonus. I was thankful for the experience, which has now become a fond memory – a reminder of how we all can make a difference as a team for many, many people, in just a few hours of our time.

Visiting with Friends

Story by Layonne Holmes

Explaining a Holiday Express event in just a few words can be a real challenge. The people we visit often have no idea what to expect and volunteers just know that the show must go on. There's an air of anticipation as we wait for that moment of unifying holiday spirit.

Friends House in New York City is a residential community for those living with AIDS that provides support services and affordable housing. It's a place that approximately fifty people call home, as a

Continued on next page



Volunteer: Dottie Cooper

Year Joined: 2005

Year One

I am not totally sure what to expect. I have signed on because every time I see the band play at the Count Basie Theatre, I watch the video they play before the show and cry and think... wow, I need to get involved. So here I am at my first event. It is held in Asbury Park for CPC Centers. I don't even know what that means but I show up to help. I begin to unload boxes from a truck with the rest of the volunteers. I have no idea at that point what the boxes hold but I am just following the flow. Next we put out table cloths on all the tables and start to set up to serve food. The crowd starts shuffling in and I now understand who our guests are. As the food arrives, I join the serving line. This is a new experience for me and I am a bit overwhelmed by the assembly line and the pace we need to keep in order to serve this crowd. But, I quickly fall into place and am in awe at how well we all work together. Now the only part that I am familiar with begins – *the band plays!* I am timid at first and just stand on the sidelines and observe. I quickly realize this is not about watching the band – it is about interacting with the crowd. So out I go to make my first contact. Once I see – and feel – the joy that comes from this... I'm hooked. The band stops now and again to raffle some gifts. And then they call up Darrell from the audience to sing with them. I am so touched that everyone in the band knows him by name, and very impressed by his singing. At the end of the party when Santa arrives, I realize all those boxes we carried in contain gift bags for every single guest in this room. I watch as gifts are handed out to this large crowd. I leave there that night feeling wonderful – but I am also in awe because to me, this one event was monumental enough to pull off. How do we do this 49 more times in 30 some days?

As the season progressed I was involved in five more events. By now I have no doubt in my mind that *I will be volunteering here for life*, and I am very sad when the season comes to a close because *I think* that is it until the next year. I have very little knowledge of what goes on behind the scenes and how this is all orchestrated.

Year Two

As the emails in the "off season" start arriving for various events, I am anxious to help. I sign up for the Matheny Prom, the Golf Outing and the Dinner Dance. Because I "somehow" find myself as a co-chair of the Dinner Dance auction, I spend a lot of time at the warehouse. Here, I once again am humbled and impressed to see the behind-the-scenes story played out. The first group I meet and experience are the afternoon elves. The number of actual kids that show up on any given day varies and I think on some days, chaos would be the best way to describe this scene. Somehow, through all this, Joan and Marilee manage to direct the kids and get the products staged for the assembly line of bag packing. They fill the bags and they even make cards for our "peeps." And all this in only an hour and a half per afternoon! As it gets closer to the dinner dance and season, I find myself spending mornings at the warehouse, as well preparing and helping in the office. I now meet the morning elves. This, too, is quite a group. Each morning the number varies but there are a few regulars that seem to make it every day. Maureen King leads this crew and the number of bags they pack is astounding to me. The entire behind the scenes picture becomes much clearer to me as I watch this all unfold. This year, when I attend the events I signed up for (a little over a dozen), I have a greater appreciation of what it takes to produce each event. Again, the best way to describe my reaction is that I am in awe. I am grateful that I found this group of wonderful people and proud to be a tiny part of the whole big picture.



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family that takes good care of each other. There were probably more of us than them at first, yet before the party started we were already making friends. The excitement brought in more guests and the Grinch and Elves made even the quietest partygoers smile. Elvis made an appearance and performed several encores since nobody wanted him to leave. The dancing was in full swing by then and the room soon transformed into a 70s Disco. The topper was a Cabaret performance by one of the residents, an amazing rendition of Honeysuckle Rose.

As we packed to leave, there was an eager kind of talk, the way friends who have just discovered each other can be. That evidence that a connection was made was a wonderful thing. One of the residents wrote, "You proved we are not forgotten." Definitely not! We became old friends in no time.

Staten Island Special Olympics

Story by Kathie Sterzinar

My decision to volunteer with Holiday Express in 2006 really brought home just how rewarding community service can be. To say that the experience was very spiritual is not an exaggeration.

As a mother, it was difficult for me in the beginning because my first event was for Cerebral Palsy. However, at each event I attended, I walked away taking a bit of the holiday magic from one of the clients or caregivers who touched my heart.

I was on such an emotional high throughout the season

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Volunteer: Phyllis McQuillan

Year Joined: 2006

I had been aware of Holiday Express for about ten years and always had great admiration for all involved. I also was a rabid fan and attended every public performance I could, whether it was at the Meadowlands, the Tradewinds, the Convention Hall or the Count Basie Theatre.

I always wished I could be a part of this great group as a volunteer, but there seemed to be two big obstacles in my way: I had a job that required a lot of travel, so I was unable to make a firm time commitment, and I lived in New York. Fast-forward to 2006 when I had two big revelations: I now have a job that has wacky hours, but gives me chunks of time off in the middle of the week; and, despite my New York address, I am a Jersey girl at heart who spends every possible spare moment at the shore – whatever the season.

Beginning anything new is always kind of stressful for me, and joining Holiday Express as a volunteer was no exception. After all, a lot of these folks had been working together for a long time and established strong, warm bonds. Well, those feelings of being the new kid in school disappeared as soon as I walked into the warehouse – folks greeted me warmly and by the end of the day I felt like I had known everyone for years. For me, the real test would be going on the road to my first event – which actually turned out to be two events in one day: the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) and the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital.

Boarding the bus brought back memories of a class field trip – a joyous, raucous bunch sharing laughs, food and stories. Everyone was very loose and laid-back during the trip, but once the bus stopped in front of TASK, everyone sprang into action like a well-oiled machine – unloading the bus of gifts, supplies, prizes, costumes and instruments. In record time, the band set up, the clients were brought in, the food was served and we were off and running.

My job was to hand out raffle tickets to the men and make sure everyone had a chance to win some of the prizes. I have to admit, I initially hung back a little – unsure of what I was supposed to do. But once the music started and folks started smiling and laughing and dancing, their joy was infectious. These were people that, for one reason or another, really didn't have much to smile about. But the fact that I was on the receiving end of so many smiles and hugs and was part of something that made them forget about their troubles for at least little while was unbelievably rewarding.

After the show, the outgoing head of TASK came on the bus to thank us and tell us how much the yearly visit means to his clients. He really didn't have to say that – it was more than evident on the faces of the folks who, although down on their luck, had clearly not lost hope.

It was then onto our next stop, the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital. The off-loading of the trucks was repeated and this time we were serving snacks, so plates of cookies and pound cake were divvied up and the patients were brought in to enjoy their Christmas party.

Much to my delight, I was asked to be an elf for the show. I happily suited-up and soon found that engaging the patients was very easy. Once they heard the great music, everyone wanted to dance – especially with an elf!

I didn't think I would ever be able to duplicate the high I felt at TASK – just seeing how resilient the human spirit is, was amazing – but interacting with the patients was exhilarating. It was so rewarding being a part of something

that was bringing them such joy. At the end of the party, the person in charge of the hospital gathered us together to thank us and tell us that the patients loved us and will remember this day for a long time. The feeling was mutual – my first road trip with Holiday Express was unforgettable.



Continued from previous page

that I shared with everyone with whom I came in contact. For me, this is what the holiday season is all about.

When you are able to show kindness to complete strangers, it helps transform some of the unfortunate things that are often a part of everyday life. The gift back to me was in the eyes and smiles of those that we visited, and it was a truly inspirational experience.

I came away humbled by what Holiday Express does and by the clients we visit. I was impressed by the warmth and strength that radiated from all. Holiday Express gives hope and courage. To experience music touch the heart of the physically and mentally challenged was amazing! It reinforced my belief that I am truly blessed in my family.

As my excitement grew, I wanted to spread the Holiday Express word, and it was a natural fit for me at my job with the AT&T organization. I am part of the Pioneers, a dynamic group of retired and active employees who volunteer their time to enhance the communities where they work and live. I chose to be the Event Manager for Staten Island Special Olympics because my organization is mostly based in the NY Metropolitan Area. It was easy to enroll volunteers from AT&T to help with this wonderful event. The Pioneers donated \$500 and we purchased sports equipment from the wish list. My co-workers not only enjoyed themselves at the event, but were also inspired to learn more about Holiday Express. I now feel that they will always be willing to participate with future projects.

The Children's Center of Monmouth County

Story by Maureen Staub

One of my friends is a nurse at the Children's Center of Monmouth County located in Neptune, an alternative school for children with disabilities. Any time we spoke about her job, she would tell me how the kids at the Children's Center kept her going. When the school districts can't provide for their needs, students come to this "haven" or "heaven" to attend school. Then I discovered that two of our Holiday Express volunteers have children enrolled

there. When one of the volunteers told us that "his children don't get invited to parties," I knew the Children's Center had to get on the Holiday Express schedule.

It wasn't without its challenges. Our contact at the Children's Center was hesitant, to say the least. She had no idea who we were or what we did. Amy and I did our best to convince her that Holiday Express would bring joy to this campus. We agreed to do two forty-five minute shows with 45 children at each show.

At 8:15 am, before the parade of handicapped buses arrived, it was just the sound guy and me setting up in a large recreation room inside an aluminum building with a high-ceiling. An hour later Holiday Express reinforcements arrived and the room magically transformed – as it always does. As the children arrived for the first show, I realized why so few children could come to each event. Each student had an aide or shared one with another child. That meant we had about 70 guests which filled the room to capacity.

The band started and the kids didn't hesitate to get out of their seats and take over the room; and they didn't stop until the band stopped. The face painters, characters, crafters and band kept the party going. Bob and Leslie Sickles made their debut as characters at this event and they were terrific. Initially, the aides were concerned because of the children's high level of activity and excitement, but that was more than okay with us. The children didn't hesitate to get right up with the musicians who patiently helped them play the instruments.

Even the blow-up Santa had a dance partner that morning, thanks to one of the children.

To see the smiles of joy and wonder on the faces of Cal and Faith when their dad, dressed as the Grinch, stood in front of them made our persistence all the more worthwhile. You can be assured that they will be eager for our party next year!

Trinity Episcopal Soup Kitchen

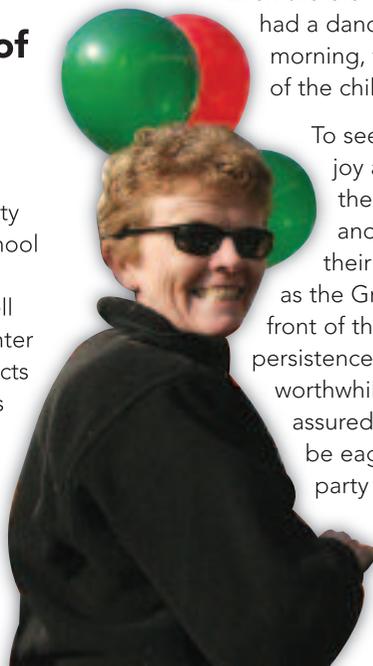
Story by Donald Pignataro



On December 24, as the regulars lined up outside the steps of 505 Fifth Avenue, Asbury Park, for what is known as Saturday Soup, they began to realize something was different. They were greeted by friendly Holiday Express volunteers (Elves), served hot soup and heard music coming from inside the Trinity Episcopal gymnasium-turned-dining hall.

Once inside they were treated to a full Holiday Express event. Jim Celestino led the phenomenal musical ensemble, including special guest, Janice Siegel of Manhattan Transfer. The Grinch and Frosty delighted the dancing crowd. Jill Osis, Parish Administrator, was thrilled with the guest's dancing and interaction with the band. "This is great," she said, "these people never get to see a live band, let alone one of this professional level."

Many thanks to Neil Jordan and the kitchen staff at McLoone's Pier House Restaurant for providing a delicious meal for more than 250 guests, and to all the musicians and volunteers who helped make our first-ever "two events on Christmas Eve" a rocking success.



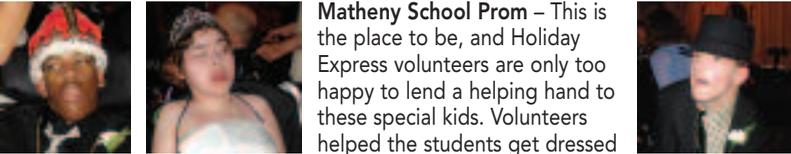
2006 Holiday Express

April 15



Sgt. Pat's 5K Race and the Holiday Express 2-Mile Fitness Walk – honoring slain officer Pat King, husband of volunteer Maureen King. Funds raised from the race contribute to the Pat King Scholarship Fund and fitness walk funds are donated to Holiday Express.

May 11



Matheny School Prom – This is the place to be, and Holiday Express volunteers are only too happy to lend a helping hand to these special kids. Volunteers helped the students get dressed

in their finest, served food, danced and performed all the party favorites.

June 7

First Volunteer Wine & Cheese Celebration – Current and prospective volunteers were invited to party at the warehouse as a 'Thank You' and to get educated about the volunteer opportunities available within the organization.



June 17

The Fab Faux Benefit Concert held at the Count Basie Theatre raised money for three Monmouth County organizations: the Count Basie Theatre, the Community YMCA of Red Bank, and Holiday Express. For the fifth year, the foursome – Will Lee, Jimmy Vivino, Rich Pagano and Jack Petruzzelli – rocked the theatre with the music of the Beatles. Holiday Express was awarded a check for more than \$5,000.

June 30

Scholarship Awards – Holiday Express awarded nearly \$60,000 to twelve students, some of whom are close to graduating.

July 24

4th Annual Golf Classic – This annual event, held at Manasquan River Golf Club in Brielle raises over \$33K for the scholarship fund. The 2007 event takes place on July 23.

July 29

Annual Summer BBQ at St. John's Soup Kitchen, Newark – Nothing demonstrates the Holiday Express commitment more than showing our clients that caring happens all year round. Our friends at St. John's know they won't only see us at Christmas, Holiday Express volunteers are continually helping to stock shelves, donate clothing and serve up some good old fashioned home cooking.

October 20-21

Sickles Market Wine & Cheese Tasting Fundraiser – This year, the wine and cheese tasting and apple pie contest, raised over \$86K for Holiday Express.

November 17

Annual Dinner Dance – The 2006 Dinner Dance featured the latest scholarship winners, a speech by our friend from Colorado, Dawn Anna, and Big Joe Henry from NJ 101.5 as Master of Ceremonies for the evening.

November 24

Red Bank Tree Lighting – This annual event had the largest attendance ever, and is always a glittering and friendly beginning to the holiday season.



November 25

Epiphany House – "We hope the joy you give will return to you a hundredfold." – Maria Ursino, Director Of Development

November 29

Bonnie Brae – "I was the one that was singing "Silent Night" with Mary. I just wanted to say that I am so happy that you all came." – Joshua

December 3

Make-A-Wish – "This was the third time I was fortunate enough to attend The Holiday Express Wish Party. It is very difficult to describe what a fantastic happening this is. Holiday Express not only puts on a tremendous show, but they have activities for the children, give them gifts, help clean up, and more. The place was so cheerful, as if these wish children and their families hadn't a care in the world. Once again, my appreciation goes out to all of you who have in some way enabled me to enjoy being a Make-A-Wish volunteer as much as I do." – Tony



December 4

A. Harry Moore School – "The love you show for our kids is our most cherished gift." – Alexander DeNoble, Ed.D

December 9

Woodbine Developmental Center – "The show at Woodbine Developmental Center was fantastic. The room was filled with unbridled joy from start to finish. On behalf of all the residents of WDC I say thank you..." – Dave Terry



Big Joe Henry Holiday Extravaganza, Once again our biggest fan, Big Joe Henry from NJ 101.5 held his annual fundraiser for children's charities in Point Pleasant. It has become an annual event for Fred, our dedicated and beloved bus driver from Helfrich, to turn up the bus radio so Holiday Express volunteers coming home from the Woodbine Developmental Center can listen to the "other show" of the day!

December 10



Crystal Lake Convalescent Center – "Our residents do not respond the way they usually do when you are entertaining. We had some residents that were deaf or blind and all were swaying to the music with a smile on their face. You touch our emotions from tears to joy!" – Linda DellaPietro, Director Resident Activities



Events And Highlights



December 12

Children's Center of Monmouth County – "Holiday Express pulled off an amazing amount of hard work and effort on behalf of all your clients. Your volunteer base is the best, really some of the nicest, kindest, hardworking people I know. I am proud to be associated with such a group, but prouder still that I could actually help this year! As other volunteers have told me, "you don't know till you go to a real show." Next year I promise to "get on the bus" too. It was very rewarding being an elf and the Cookie Monster. Thank you for the opportunity and the fun and the laughs and the smiles. You are all the best! – Bob Sickles, Sickles Market

December 13

CPC Behavioral Health – "We had at least two first-time volunteers there and they stepped right up and did whatever was asked of them, smiling all the while. The music was great as always, the band members outdid themselves, and I am always touched by the volunteers who are so good at mingling and dancing so nicely with everyone – you know who you are and you are awesome..." – Dawn Walsh

December 15

CP League of Cranford – "Our sincere thanks to all the people who came to work the show and all of the people behind the scenes. A special thank you to Sue Ralph, our event manager, who was always just a phone call away." – Martha Goz, Social Worker

December 18



Eva's Village – "I want to take this opportunity to thank your organization for bringing the most beautiful gift of Christmas to so many people in need – *the gift of joy and service!* I felt the authenticity in how you displayed caring and love to those that truly needed it, by making them feel that they were important and by serving with love and showing them

the respect that, for many of them, has been lost for them and others. *You treated them with dignity!* I left the celebration feeling empowered by you! I also learned the importance of serving those in need and how rewarding it is." – Martha Ochoa

December 19

Harbor School – "All of us had been counting the days from when you were here last year, as we couldn't wait for another Holiday Express event! Every moment of that two hours you spent with us will be treasured for a lifetime." – Anne Guteski, Principal

December 19 & 21

Count Basie Theatre Benefit Concerts



December 20

Friends House, NYC – "Thank you SO MUCH for your spirit and generosity. That was the BEST Christmas at Friends House." – Beau

December 24

St. John's Soup Kitchen – "Holiday Express filled the air with joyous Christmas songs, and our hearts with love and peace. 800 people were served on Christmas Eve!" – Barbara Maran



December 24



Trinity Church Soup Kitchen – "Our guests, had nothing but words of gratitude and praise for your organization. They were especially overwhelmed by the friendliness and caring of your many volunteers. I cannot tell you how much this meant to the people of our neighborhood, many of whom had never had the pleasure of attending such a joyful Christmas celebration." – Jill Osis, Administrator

Peter Cancro, Jersey Mike's Subs
More than 7,000 subs donated for the
2006 Season

Suzette O'Brien, Gourmet Picnic, Fair Haven
10/26 – Holiday Express Press Event
(approximately 60 people)

11/25 – Epiphany House
(approximately 175 people)

11/26 – Spring House, Sisters Academy,
NJ Blind Citizens Association, West Side
Christian Academy, Joan Valentine
House, Volunteers of America
(approximately 250 people)

12/19 – Count Basie Theatre
(approximately 80 people)

McLoone's Pier House
11/28 – Medallion Care
(approximately 125 people)

Local restaurants have
continually supplied gourmet
meals to make events extra
special. Holiday Express
would like to say
Thank You
to the restaurants and
food specialty shops that
donated food in 2006

Steve Levine, Windmill, Long Branch
11/29 – Bonnie Brae
(approximately 90 people)

Rick Bott, Merri-Makers
12/6 – St. Paul's Homeless Shelter
(approximately 90 people)

12/18 – Eva's Village
(approximately 350 people)

Whole Foods, Middletown
12/21 – Count Basie Theatre
(approximately 80 people)

McLoone's Pier House
12/24 – Trinity Church Soup Kitchen
(approximately 250 people)

McLoone's Riverside Dining
12/24 – St. John's Soup Kitchen
(approximately 800 people)

Helping Holiday Express Deliver Volunteer Spotlight

Volunteers give more than time and talent; they give that something special that is theirs alone. Each moment spent dancing, hugging, listening and comforting creates memories that are unique to each individual. As volunteers since Holiday Express' hopeful beginnings, these two members have memories of their own – sweet, heartrending, and adding to the collective Holiday Express story.

Bob Boyd

Drummer Bob Boyd has been a driving force behind the hardest working holiday band around. As a member of Holiday Express since it began in 1993, he sits perched behind the myriad of musicians and vocalists, keeping time with a unique view of the events of the day.

Bob has been a professional drummer for 30 years and is a member of AFM (American Federation of Musicians) and PAS (Percussive Arts Society). He currently performs with Tim McLoone & the Shirleys, as well as his own Bob Boyd Trio. He also teaches privately, and as an Adjunct Professor at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, NJ. Bob has written several articles for various music publications.

"I got involved when Tim first began talking to musicians about Holiday Express. I thought it sounded like a great idea at the time and I was right." Over the years, Bob has traveled with the group to Columbine High School and New Orleans, has played at the legendary Convention Hall and Tradewinds, and just about every other big venue in the tri-state area – with a long list of celebrities and talent.

"I'm sure you've heard this before – 'There are so many memorable moments,' which is true, but one that really stands out was the first time Tyrone sang "White Christmas" at the Trenton Soup Kitchen. I'll never forget it." Referring to a long-time client and friend of Holiday Express, Bob recalls a special time in the early

years, one made bittersweet by Tyrone's passing in 2006. He continued, "Everyone in the room shared a great moment, together. It was beautiful. I had a tough time playing there this year since he was gone."

Poignant times like these are what make the job worthwhile, and sometimes the hardest. When asked about his challenges within the group, he jokingly replied, "Making the early bus, but besides that, just trying to do a great job on the drums." Well, he is a musician after all...

Bob continued, "One thing I've taken from Holiday Express is witnessing the power of music. If I ever have a moment of reflection or question on my career choice, I can

think of all the special experiences I've had playing in all the shows I've done, and I feel as though I am doing something meaningful." When you see him allowing the little hands of our child guests to bang feverishly on his kit, you know that Bob's focus is on the big picture.

Now on to the 15th season, Bob looks forward to many more years with the Holiday Express family. "I think of all the friendships I've made in HoEx. We're all growing older together, and it's truly a pleasure."



Thank You, Bob

JoAnn Ralph

A long-time member who joined in 1994, JoAnn has served as an Event Volunteer, Event Manager and Dinner Dance Chairperson. Encompassed in these job titles are numerous responsibilities and she's handled them all with a quiet smile. "I'll do just about anything that needs to be done when I can," she said, "...unpack trucks, play characters, face painting, crafts, guest interaction and food service."

JoAnn became involved through her sister-in-law, Ann Robinson, and her family connection to the organization. "It was an invaluable outlet to many of us who were grieving numerous family losses that occurred in the early 1990s, and looking for a way to give to others and really be connected to those we were helping. It was also a wonderful way for me to grow and learn while going through a separation and divorce – it truly helps take you away from your own problems and put things in proper perspective."

A native of Monmouth County who attended Wall High School, JoAnn has been working in different aspects of the insurance industry for over 30 years. "I run the insurance/risk management consulting group of an international accounting firm – Rothstein Kass & Company." A principal of the firm since 1999, she has worked in the firm's Roseland headquarters since joining in 1997.

The oldest girl in a family of 5 children, JoAnn has two older brothers: Lee Mrowicki, who some know from his days at the Stone Pony and now at Freehold Music; and Mike Mrowicki, who lives in Vermont and has been a lifelong friend of another Holiday Express member – Tommy LaBella. Her younger sister Nadine lives in California and younger brother John lives in Avon, NJ while Mom lives in Jackson.

"My family has been extended because of my personal relationship with Terry Burke, which includes his three children. Terry has been able to attend several events over the years and it has been great to share the experiences that are so important to my life with him."



Like many volunteers, JoAnn finds time management the most challenging part of her involvement, but she has also learned a valuable lesson in 'going with the flow.' "In the early years as an Event Coordinator, it was sometimes difficult not to have everything planned out in advance (the control freak in me has learned much from these experiences). I've learned to be more flexible and adaptable to situations; and perhaps have different expectations – or none at all; and just be in the moment. "

"Each event usually brings special moments. This past year at Eva's Village was extra special. Early in the evening the guests had their "walls" in place, but as the night went on and the trust evolved there were true moments of connection." She recalls just such a moment years ago, at St. Paul's Shelter in Paterson, which aids transient individuals and families, many of whom are trying to put their lives back together.

"I was making crafts with some kids and one little girl came over with her mother – the girl was about 6 years old and her name was Angel. Angel's father had recently died and the sadness was deep in this little girl's eyes. Angel wasn't speaking and as I helped her make an angel craft, I just couldn't find a way that I could see was drawing her into the experience. But then, as she walked away from the table she turned around and blew me a kiss – she didn't speak English but she understood the universal language of caring that somehow I had communicated. I've never seen this Angel again and she is now a teenager – I pray that the love she showed me is being returned to her each day; she truly continues to inspire me and realize there are many ways to show caring for others and many ways it is received."

JoAnn joined the Holiday Express trip to Littleton, Colorado in 1999 to promote healing for the community of Columbine High School. She remembers, "It was truly a remarkable experience; it was a very different type of event because it was the first time we were dealing with people who had a need so different from other events in some ways; but it really wasn't very different in terms of what we needed to do while there – be there, listen, talk, hug and provide some hope for joy. The camaraderie among ALL of the Holiday Express volunteers was different as well – it was a journey we were all taking together."

With her own joie-de-vivre, it's easy to understand why JoAnn refers to Holiday Express as one of her passions and why we are lucky to have her on the volunteer roster.

Thank You, JoAnn



We deeply appreciate your generosity – without it, Holiday Express could not deliver.



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Our friend Mildred, who never misses the Holiday Express show at Crystal Lake, celebrated her 95th birthday in January, 2007.



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