



## To Those Who Believe in the Magic of the Season!

by Paul Huegel



Like children's birthday parties and Halloween events that come and go, my 9-year-old son and his 8-year-old sister will not be invited to any Christmas parties this year.

By now, I expect the party invitations to be sent to my younger daughter, Grace, with no mention of her siblings, Cal and Faith. For you see, Grace is a typical 7-year-old. She goes to school each morning and takes classes in English, math and science. She plays at recess and in gym class. She's one of the hundreds of kids in our town who play soccer, among the numerous activities that make up her week.

Cal and Faith, also wait each morning for the school bus. The difference is an aide helps them onto the bus and into a seat and their day consists of occupational therapy, speech therapy and other activities designed for children with multiple disabilities. Cal is autistic and is also afflicted with retinitis pigmentosa— he's going blind. Faith also is autistic and suffers from Bardet-Biedl Syndrome — she does not speak and has limited cognitive abilities.

The fact is, children with disabilities and illnesses aren't often seen as the life of the party... except that is, when Holiday Express brings the party to them!

For the second consecutive year, Cal and Faith will get to go to a Christmas party outside of our home as Holiday Express visits their school this December.

If you've never seen Holiday Express in action outside of the Red Bank Tree Lighting or a benefit show at the NJPAC or Count Basie Theatre, imagine if you will an empty gym with rows of folding chairs set up as if a lecture was about to take place. In less than 30 minutes, imagine a transformation unfolding as volunteers descend into the gym and a blown-up Santa, reindeer, snowman and other characters begin to fill the room. A conga line of volunteers forms around helium tanks as balloons are inflated, tied and placed around the room. Tables are set up for face-painting, tattoos, arts and crafts, and games. Like any "concert," the sound crew sets up microphones and speakers as sound checks are made... in this case, not too loud knowing

some of the partygoers have hearing sensitivity. One-by-one the band shows up, instruments in tow. And boxes of strange furry costumes are hidden in a makeshift dressing room for some very special visits during the party.

Minutes later, the partygoers arrive... some in wheelchairs, some on crutches, most with the assistance of an aide or their teacher. Trust me when I tell you that this scene will likely not be duplicated for these children at any other time during the year. But for one day, for a couple of heart-warming, fun-filled hours, these kids don't have labels — they're just kids and it's Christmas on December 11th!

Last year, as a volunteer at this party, I donned a character costume as part of the celebration. It was pretty tough to see out of that oversized, green, furry head — not because of the limited vision presented by looking through the narrow opening — but because of the tears in my eyes at seeing hundreds of kids, including my own, being treated to the party of their lives. Everyone was dancing — some kids sang with the band... others got their faces painted while still more wanted tattoos. Arts and crafts were popular but, as usual, the appearance of several special characters, including Santa himself, captivated students and teachers alike. As the party wound down, one of the teachers asked for a microphone and through tears of joy for the magical scene that she just witnessed, thanked Holiday Express for "showing such love for our beautiful children — love not often given to these children outside of family and school."

Today, I ask that you consider being a part of the magic that is Holiday Express. I ask that you join me in making a gift this holiday season to this great organization that truly lives its mission to deliver the gift of human kindness. Your gift will make a difference in the life of a "special" child, a homeless person, an "adult orphan" living at a developmental center, or any number of people whose holiday cheer will be delivered on a single day; on the day that Holiday Express comes into their lives.

*On behalf of Cal and Faith, and in anticipation of your generosity, allow me to say "Thank you!"*



## A NOTE from the President

As we prepare for our 15th season, I am increasingly struck by how far we have come since my kitchen table days in 1993. In the early years, I use to call every band member before each event to put together rosters. We would wrap a few presents and bring some snacks. Of course, back then we were only doing 20 or so events. This year will bring a new record 56 parties with an incredible number of "doubles" and "split shows" that will test both our resolve and our resources. The great thing is, because of all your dedication, I know we will get it done.

Each year we look for new challenges and new members to help us meet them; for, without all of you, this just can't happen. But this year we are also making a special request that you look to your schedules and see if you can help us out at one or more of our many weekday events. Many of them are among the most impactful places we visit, so I promise you, it will be worth your while... and, as we always say, they are waiting for us.

***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.***

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

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## Update/Don Pignataro Holiday Express Executive Director



People often ask me, "What does Holiday Express do?" The answer is not simple. We don't fit a profile or a check off category on a standard form. We are a little different from other non profits. We aren't easy to describe. It is usually near the end of my long description when it starts to set in, the person begins to draw a visual and maybe, just maybe, they feel the beginning of an emotion.

The 15th season is upon us and we are thankful for the opportunity to visit the less fortunate and brighten their day for a few hours. Between November 19 and December 24, we will visit over 50 locations by bus, truck, van and car. Some events require lots of food and gift bags; others, from the warehouse side, are considered light lifting. The one constant, regardless of size, is emotion. When the band starts, "Nobody Ought to Be Alone on Christmas" and the elves appear, you realize something good is happening. If it's your first event or your 100th, an emotion that needs to be experienced, not described, takes over as you start clapping, singing and smiling with some very courageous individuals.

It may be during the event – or sometime after – when you become thankful for being part of a genuinely good thing. We are thankful for our volunteers who give so generously of their time and of themselves. We are thankful for our supporters, the financial contributions and the in-kind donations of products that are critical for our existence. It is through the generosity of many people – the corporate sponsors, the business contributors, the individual donors – that Holiday Express can continue to reach those in need with our special brand of kindness.

Thank you for reading our newsletter, I look forward to continuing our mission with you, our loyal supporters.

## Our Amazing Volunteers

The Holiday Express Volunteers are the heart and soul of the organization. They help in the planning of the events, with particular attention to the special needs of each organization. While attending the events, they sing, dance, serve food, give hugs and smiles; and perhaps, most importantly, become genuine friends to the people we visit. Our "elves" also work tirelessly in the warehouse where they prepare gift bags for every individual at every event, stock and manage warehouse items and provide support services for our public shows and fundraising events.

Our Junior Volunteers include children and young adults from schools and scout groups, as well as individuals. Working behind the scenes with adult supervision, they package gift items, write personal notes to the recipients, and load our trucks and vans headed for various charity locations. This community spirit has become the hallmark of Holiday Express.

## Holiday Express Scholarship Program

Since 2000, Holiday Express has provided financial assistance to students who would not otherwise be able to further their education. The program has distributed over \$180,000 since its inception. This past summer a reception was held to recognize the first group of college graduates. We are very proud of these truly remarkable students and humbled by their accomplishments. Currently, three scholarships are offered.

The Lauren Townsend Scholarship, named in honor of one of the slain students of Columbine High School, seeks a student dedicated to the pursuit of excellence with an emphasis on participation in scholastic extracurricular activities and/or community service. Patrick Wall is the recipient of the Lauren Townsend award and is using the money to further his education at the University of Arts in Philadelphia. Wall graduated from Collier High School in Marlboro.

The Andrew Spenser Scholarship is named in honor of this father and husband, lost in the 2001 World Trade Center tragedy. The candidate is someone who would like to "leave this world a little better than he/she found it." Jhanny Deltus is the recipient of the Andrew Spenser Award. Deltus graduated from Academy Charter High School in Lake Como and is attending Rowan University.

The Little Steven Creative Arts Scholarship is intended to assist the recipient in pursuing a future in the field of performance and/or creative arts. Francesca Leal is the recipient of the Little Steven Creative Arts Award. She graduated from Collier High School and is attending Douglass Education Center in Monessen, PA.

## The Giving Partners Program

Each year Holiday Express visits many dozens of charity locations. Time and again we're struck by the profound needs and desperate conditions we encounter. In response to this, our Giving Partners Program was created.

Through this program, each organization we visit provides Holiday Express with a "wish list" of things they could use, but do not have the funds to purchase. Holiday Express seeks businesses and individuals interested in purchasing the desired items. The donor is encouraged to visit the location, meet the people and then present the "wish list" item at the event. This pairing of donors and charities forges a warm and personal relationship that transforms the donors and charities into true partners in caring.

The Giving Partners Program has been able to provide for the specific needs of many organizations we see. Requests include such items as furniture, clothing, food, small and large appliances, entertainment centers, beds, tickets to Broadway plays, DVD players, computers, TVs, pots and pans, wheelchairs, pool tables, treadmills, picnic tables, swimming goggles, gift cards and many other needed items.

As Holiday Express grows and continues to reach increasing numbers of those in need, the demand for Giving Partners is also growing. If you or your business would like to connect with a deserving group of people and become a Giving Partner, please contact us at 732-544-8010.

## 2007 Schedule

Friday, November 9	*11th Annual Dinner Dance
Monday, November 19	Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital
Tuesday, November 20	Ancora Psychiatric Hospital
Friday, November 23	*Red Bank Town Lighting Presented By The Perricone Family Charitable Trust
Saturday, November 24	Trinitas Hospital – Kinship Connection
Sunday, November 25	HolEx I
Monday, November 26	Passaic County Elks CP Treatment Center High School <b>Monmouth Medical Behavioral Health – Adult Unit</b> <b>Monmouth Medical Behavioral Health – Pediatric Unit</b>
Tuesday, November 27	Medallion Care <b>Passaic County Elks CP Adult Treatment Center</b>
Wednesday, November 28	School for Children Green Brook Developmental Center Bonnie Brae
Thursday, November 29	<b>Institute of Applied Human Dynamics</b> Bowery Residents' Committee
Friday, November 30	Millburn Regional Day School
Saturday, December 1	New Lisbon Developmental Center Woodbine Developmental Center
Sunday, December 2	Vineland Developmental Center Hunterdon Developmental Center
Monday, December 3	A. Harry Moore School Eva's Village
Tuesday, December 4	<b>Somerset Hills Residential Treatment Center</b> <b>Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital</b>
Wednesday, December 5	Trenton Area Soup Kitchen Trenton Psychiatric Hospital
Thursday, December 6	Easter Seals
Thursday, December 6	*NJ PAC, Newark, NJ, Presented by NetJets
Friday, December 7	Lakeview School
Saturday, December 8	*Big Joe Henry NJ101.5 Extravaganza, Pt. Pleasant, NJ
Sunday, December 9	Matheny Medical and Education Center Crystal Lake Healthcare & Rehabilitation
Monday, December 10	University Behavioral Health St. Paul's Homeless Shelter
Tuesday, December 11	Children's Center of Monmouth County Woodbridge Developmental Center
Wednesday, December 12	CPC Behavioral Health Special Olympics of Staten Island
Thursday, December 13	<b>Gateway School</b> North Jersey Developmental Center
Friday, December 14	<b>Alpha School</b>
Saturday, December 15	Eastern Christian Retreat
Monday, December 17	<b>Sister Jean's Kitchen</b> CPC Residential, Park Place, TASP, Habcore
Tuesday, December 18	Ladacin Network Harbor School
Tuesday, December 18	*Count Basie Theatre Christmas Show, Red Bank, NJ Presented By Citi
Wednesday, December 19	<b>Rivington House</b> Friends House
Thursday, December 20	Blythedale Children's Hospital
Thursday, December 20	*Count Basie Theatre Christmas Show, Red Bank, NJ Presented By The Two River Times
Friday, December 21	Center For Vocational Rehabilitation
Saturday, December 22	<b>Eliza Shirley Shelter</b>
Monday, December 24	St. John's Soup Kitchen Trinity Church Soup Kitchen

\*Indicates Public Performance

Please note that the events listed in **bold** are new this year

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



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## You Can Help Holiday Express DELIVER!

The depth of services Holiday Express is able to provide depends on the support of many generous people. Each year Holiday Express fills over 15,000 gift bags for the people we visit. Our warehouse or "Grinchville" as it has fondly become known, is a flurry of activity Santa would be proud of. Boxes, bags, pallets, carts, trucks and constant phone calls all contribute to a semi-organized environment where each event is prepared, staged for loading and delivered to the location.

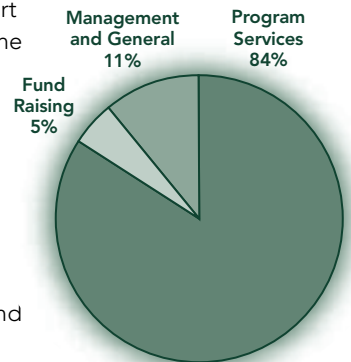
We are looking for corporations, businesses or individuals who can provide large quantities of items such as **blankets, personal care products, individually packaged cookies and snacks, books and warm hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, socks or other appropriate stocking stuffers.**

Contact the office if you can help.

## Holiday Express Financial Information

Holiday Express, Inc. is a non-profit, registered 501(c)(3) organization, with a mission 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. Contributions to Holiday Express, Inc. are deductible for Federal tax purposes.

For the fiscal year ending April 30, 2007, Holiday Express, Inc.'s support and revenue totaled \$1,397,407. Of that amount 84% was available to support the organization's Program Services. Fund-raising costs for the year were 5% of total income and 11% of income went to Management and General.



Save The Date

**6th Annual Golf Classic  
Manasquan River  
Golf Club  
Monday May 5, 2008**

