



**HOLIDAY[®]
EXPRESS**

2014 YEARBOOK



A Message from **TIM McLOONE**

To our Holiday Express family,

It would appear that, no matter what the challenge, Holiday Express is always able to accomplish its mission of bringing the gift of human kindness. I recently had suggested at a board meeting that, given the large number of volunteers we were attracting, we might try to dramatically expand the number of events we would take on. Well, our 2014 season included a record number of those events - 68 in all! And to think that first season back in 1993, we did 10...and we thought that was amazing!

Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of our office and volunteers, the connection between the warehouse and the event locations went seamlessly; a tremendous logistical accomplishment. Unfortunately for all (well, maybe some) of you, we are riding the momentum of 2014 to expand our season even more. We are also going to pass an incredible milestone. During the upcoming 2015 schedule, we will celebrate our 1,000th event! I never could have envisioned that.

Thank you to all.

Tim McLoone
Founder



Greetings from **LORRIE KLARIC**

Every holiday season is like a giant family reunion at Holiday Express. Whether you are a warehouse volunteer, event "elf," or a generous donor, each of you is invested in our mission and a member of our large and extended Holiday Express family. What makes Holiday Express so special is that the 16,000+ people we saw in 2014 are also members of our family. To so many of the individuals we serve, December 25 is just another day, but when Holiday Express shows up at the door with the gift of human kindness, it truly is the holiday season. As we head into our 23rd season, we take a moment to reflect on our past season and the lives touched, the songs sung, and the connections made as we delivered that gift of human kindness to men, women, and children in need at 68 Holiday Express events across the region. The music is the common thread that connects each and every one of us to the unique and spectacular family of Holiday Express!

During the 2014 season, I observed the unwavering commitment of thousands of volunteers working together to brighten the lives of those less fortunate. From the behind-the-scenes warehouse operation of gift bag packing, inventory taking, truck driving, and meal planning to the fabulous front-and-center talented musicians and "elves," our Holiday Express family is passionate about making sure that each event is perfect in every way. The rewards are plentiful in hugs, smiles, camaraderie, and friendship.

Holiday Express is extremely grateful for the generous support of our corporate and foundation donors, event sponsors, and individual supporters. Our promise to you is that we will be good stewards of your investment in our mission so that Holiday Express can continue to serve those desperately in need and often forgotten in the years to come.

With gratitude to Don Pignataro for ten remarkable years as executive director, I am both humbled and honored to now be a member of the Holiday Express family. There is no place I'd rather be, and I hope that our annual yearbook makes you smile as you remember the special moments of our 2014 season. Thank you for your selfless and generous contribution to Holiday Express.

Warmly,
Lorrie Klaric
Executive Director

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

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.

Yearbook Committee

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OH, THE PLACES WE'VE BEEN!

Below is our 2014 schedule of events and the 68 audiences we visited — sometimes two or even three on the same day — as our army of volunteers traveled far and wide to deliver the gift of human kindness to those who needed it most.

11/12	The Deron School	Union, NJ	12/7	Covenant House NJ	Newark, NJ
11/12	Autism Continuum	Paramus, NJ	12/8	A. Harry Moore School	Jersey City, NJ
11/13	Mount Carmel Guild - Union County ICMS	Linden, NJ	12/8	CPC Behavioral Healthcare, Park Place, Booker Behavioral & Comm. Connections	Asbury Park, NJ
11/14	St. Joseph's School for the Blind	Jersey City, NJ	12/9	NJEDDA Elementary School	Clifton, NJ
11/15	Devereux	Red Bank, NJ	12/9	Harbor School	Eatontown, NJ
11/16	Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital	Morris Plains, NJ	12/10	Community Care Behavioral Health	Freehold, NJ
11/17	Mental Health Association of Morris County - ICMS	Mountain Lakes, NJ	12/10	Straight & Narrow	Paterson, NJ
11/18	Ocean Mental Health	Toms River, NJ	12/11	Hawkswood School	Eatontown, NJ
11/18	Catholic Charities Housing Services	Jersey City, NJ	12/11	NJPAC	Newark, NJ
11/19	Spectrum for Living	Rockleigh, NJ	12/12	Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey	Mountainside, NJ
11/19	High Point School	Morganville, NJ	12/12	Alpha School	Jackson, NJ
11/20	The Children's Therapy Center	Midland Park, NJ	12/13	Emmanuel Cancer Foundation	New Brunswick, NJ
11/20	Community Access Unlimited	Mountainside, NJ	12/13	Eastern Christian Children's Retreat	Wyckoff, NJ
11/21	NJEDDA High School	Clifton, NJ	12/14	St. Francis Inn	Philadelphia, PA
11/22	Mercy Home	Brooklyn, NY	12/14	Hunterdon Developmental Center	Clinton, NJ
11/23	Matheny Medical & Education Center	Peapack, NJ	12/15	Gateway School	Carteret, NJ
11/23	Crystal Lake Healthcare & Rehabilitation	Bayville, NJ	12/15	Ladacin Network	Wanamassa, NJ
11/24	Catholic Charities - Partners in Recovery	Trenton, NJ	12/15	Joseph's House	Camden, NJ
11/25	Woodbine Developmental Center	Woodbine, NJ	12/16	Trenton Area Soup Kitchen	Trenton, NJ
11/25	Ancora Psychiatric Hospital	Ancora, NJ	12/16	Trenton Psychiatric Hospital	West Trenton, NJ
11/28	Red Bank Town Lighting	Red Bank, NJ	12/17	University Behavioral Health	Somerset, NJ
11/29	Turning Point	Paterson, NJ	12/17	Audrey Hepburn Children's House	Hackensack, NJ
12/1	The Center for Educational Advancement	Flemington, NJ	12/18	Easter Seals	Lincroft, NJ
12/1	CVR	Eatontown, NJ	12/18	Count Basie Theatre	Red Bank, NJ
12/2	Regional Day School at Jackson	Jackson, NJ	12/19	Blythedale Children's Hospital	Valhalla, NY
12/2	Trinitas Regional Med Ctr - Br Bonaventure Residents	Elizabeth, NJ	12/19	Lakeview School	Edison, NJ
12/3	Norman A. Bleshman Regional Day School	Paramus, NJ	12/20	Oasis - A Haven for Women and Children	Paterson, NJ
12/3	Eva's Village	Paterson, NJ	12/20	New Lisbon Developmental Center	New Lisbon, NJ
12/4	Medallion Behavioral Health	Clifton, NJ	12/21	Vineland Developmental Center	Vineland, NJ
12/4	NJEDDA Adult Training Center	Clifton, NJ	12/21	Lyons House - Ctr of Recovery & Hope - Jespy House	Lyons, NJ
12/5	The Children's Center of Monmouth County	Neptune, NJ	12/22	The Phoenix Center	Nutley, NJ
12/6	Hudson Milestones	Jersey City, NJ	12/24	St. John's Soup Kitchen	Newark, NJ
12/6	Children's Specialized Hosp - Mountainside Campus	Mountainside, NJ	12/24	Trinity Church Soup Kitchen	Asbury Park, NJ
12/7	Children's Specialized Hosp - Toms River Campus	Toms River, NJ	12/24	St. Ann's Soup Kitchen	Newark, NJ

All Aboard the



*"The clients want to thank you for their gift packages, the raffle gifts, and all the wonderful food, music, singing, and special character visitors."
— Center for Educational Advancement*

*"It is amazing how the volunteers become part of us and we become part of you. It is as if, for a few shining moments, we have no worries or cares. These moments you bring to us and to others are a gift that lasts long after you leave us."
— Alpha School*



*"We can never stop talking about your organization and the wonderful service you provide for students with disabilities. The time and effort your members dedicate to this annual event is phenomenal and deeply appreciated by our school."
— Deron School*

*"Thank you for all the wonderful things you do for our children; it's truly amazing. We will use the funds to meet the needs of the long-term care children. There is so much happiness and cheer that fills the air on the day of the party. To see the children and families smiling and being together is such a special gift."
— Children's Specialized Hospital*



*"As usual, Holiday Express' thoughtfulness and kindness touched the lives of so many consumers, who continue to talk about the party. The consumers greatly appreciated their backpacks filled with goodies."
— Easter Seals New Jersey*

*"There are so many priceless memories created during the show that Harbor School will never forget. Each year, there is another added surprise. This year, the snow cones were an amazing hit!"
— Harbor School*



As tired as I am today - and boy, am I TIRED - I really love doing this and you have no idea what a blessing it is for me, personally. We are there for these people who are going through all kinds of things, and through all of that, they find a reason to smile and be grateful, even if it's just for a couple of hours. It makes me realize over and over again how blessed I am, and so humbled to be able to be a part of the reason that someone can smile and feel happy.



The Love Train

"I wanted to share a little story from one of our parents. This young boy is predominately non-verbal. His mom called and was in tears. Happy tears! She said that all last night (for the very first time in his life) he came home and told her what happened at school. And did not stop talking about the Holiday Express until he closed his eyes at night! What an amazing impact it had on him! And all of us! Beautiful!"

— Phoenix Center

Right after my mom passed, I was invited to go with Holiday Express to St. John's Soup Kitchen. What an amazing experience it was. I had just lost my mom and my heart was broken, but seeing those folks, how happy they were, and Holiday Express doing this for them was the best Christmas ever.

"The clients want to thank you for their gift packages, the raffle gifts, and all the wonderful food, music, singing, and special character visitors."

— Center for Educational Advancement

"Our daughter was one of the patients you entertained today. We just got home from visiting her – and when she told us about her afternoon, her face lit up! There are patients there that have no one who cares – no visits – and they rely on the staff and people like your organization to bring a meaning to their day. I just wanted to thank you for making a difference today."

— Parents of a Trenton Psychiatric patient

"Your visit and the spirit you brought truly embodied the spirit of your mission to bring the give most needed, the gift of human kindness. I suspect you know that your party is a great vehicle to bring people together in a way that breaks down barriers and builds up human connections."

— Joseph's House

"You have blessed our young people with peace, love, joy, and plenty of reasons to smile.

We all join together to thank you for all that you do for our community. What a blessing you are to our kids!"

— Covenant House





THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE: *Thank You For Letting Us Shine!*



During the 2014 holidays, Holiday Express celebrated its 22nd season! Our mission of bringing the gift of human kindness to those who need it most has grown beyond our wildest imagination. This past year, our dedicated, big-hearted army of merry volunteers and talented musicians performed at nearly 70 events, striving to brighten the lives of more than 16,000 very special guests in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, beginning in early November and continuing through Christmas Eve!

Whether it is a soup kitchen, a specialized school, a psychiatric facility, or a homeless shelter, these people – adults and children alike – are our neighbors, our friends, and sometimes, our family. And it is not just the residents with whom we share our holiday joy; sometimes the biggest smiles in the room come from their loved ones and caregivers – those special, selfless, dedicated souls to whom we pay tribute with Holiday Express' very special rendition of the song "This Little Light of Mine."

From the bottom of our hearts, we are so thankful to all of the clients and caregivers we visit – and so appreciative for all the kind words of welcome and gratitude that they share with us in return.

The next time things don't go exactly the way I want, instead of getting bummed out, I am just going to think about the children I met today. They had nothing but the party and music we brought to them, and the people who work at the hospital to take care of them. They had no family, and no worldly possessions. At first I could not contain my tears, but then I started interacting with the kids. Some of them could smile... which made me smile, too. I am so humbled to be a Holiday Express volunteer! We all need to remember to be thankful for all that we have...because some of our fellow human beings have absolutely nothing.

One thing that you quickly realize when you volunteer at a Holiday Express event is how much it takes you out of your usual comfort zone. After all, how many of us are accustomed to walking up to perfect strangers – particularly those who may be elderly, disabled, or disheveled – and reaching out our hands to ask them to dance? And it's hardest to cross that threshold when you approach someone who appears to be reclusive, withdrawn, sad, or even angry – although you realize afterwards that those may be the people who need that extended hand the most, since they may also be feeling like they're outside their comfort zone. The lesson becomes clear when you have those blessed and surprising "Holiday Express moments," and learn that sometimes, outside the comfort zone is sometimes the best place to be!





Notes from the Road

Here are excerpts from this season's online blog by one of our talented musical elves, with reflections on some of our many events.

Catholic Charities — Jersey City, NJ

The Catholic Charities Housing Services offers shelter to the homeless and destitute in the Hudson County area. The key at these places is to treat everyone with the dignity they deserve as human beings. Holiday Express was there to deliver a much-welcome hot meal, as well as a party. As I was serving the main course, I noticed the humility in all of our guests - everyone was looking out for their neighbor, making sure they got something to eat, and thanking us profusely. It became clear to me that, regardless of our individual situations, we were really all there for the same reason: to have a good time.

For the first half of the show, I was very focused on my own playing. When I was finally able to look out in the crowd, what a party I saw! The kids were dancing and singing and some of the adults were cutting loose and connecting with the band. There were also a lot of folks just sitting at their tables taking it all in, like they were being transported somewhere else for a while. I saw a guy wipe away a tear as Santa came out to greet the kids. He tried to hide it...but I saw him.

For the first time I can remember, we didn't end the event with the Holiday Express theme "All Alone on Christmas." Instead, Sheldon delivered an inspired version of "O, Holy Night." It was the coldest night of the season so far, and as our guests started to file out, our bandleader Jim wished them all well and it was over. I guess we are never sure what happens to the people we see in these sorts of situations after we leave. At least we can hope that they enjoyed themselves in the brief time we were together. It certainly was a holy night of sorts. For all of us.

Covenant House — Newark, NJ

Covenant House is a new event this year for Holiday Express. It helps homeless and at-risk kids between 18 and 21 years old learn various life skills and provides a safe environment for them.

It was really fun to see how a crowd of teenagers and young adults, who had no idea of what to expect, react to something like the Disco Santas (which, to the uninitiated, is a clever mash-up of "Macho Man" and "YMCA," complete with dancing Santas from the audience). I was pleased to see all the energy and enthusiasm in the room for all of the craziness.

These kids are in this group because they've had a hard life to this point. But, the nice thing is that they are working their way out of it. I particularly took notice of how supportive they all were of each other. They genuinely were happy for everyone who won raffle gifts and, as a whole, were very good-natured. This is a common theme where there are people who have fallen on hard times. Perhaps when the situation isn't ideal, you have to learn to find happiness in other things. These kids certainly have. And at Covenant House, they are in good hands.

Community Access Unlimited — Mountainside, NJ

It's hard to pinpoint my favorite part of this event. Was it the gentleman who sang "Hound Dog" with the band? Or the lively version of "I'm A Believer" that got everyone out of their seats and rocking? Or what about the surprisingly solid debut of the soon-to-be-classic "Moves Like Santa," the Holiday Express-ified version of Maroon 5's "Moves Like Jagger"? Whatever it was, I was pleased to see how the at-first shy crowd eventually loosened up and enjoyed themselves. CAU serves a wide variety of people, some with mental and physical disabilities. It definitely was a difficult crowd to connect with at first, but by the end, there were people jumping around and singing along. And that's the most important thing.

One of the things I am always impressed by - and the aspect that surprises many people who see a Holiday Express event for the first time - is how efficient and organized the volunteers are. Everything has its place and everyone has a job. And if they don't have a job, they are always willing to step up and help. It is certainly hard work, but a good night with a great crowd like this makes it all worth it.

by Matt S.

Devereux — Red Bank, NJ

There are two distinct types of crowds that I've seen over the years I've been with Holiday Express. There are those that come in full of energy and excitement for the party that will take place, and then there are some that are a bit more reserved – which can take some time to win over, but we are absolutely nothing if not persistent. The kids of Devereux have been through a lot in their young lives and we are told only to engage with them verbally and not physically; which, when said to a Holiday Express volunteer who gives roughly 96,000 hugs a season, can be a bit disappointing.

But once the kids got into the music, there was no stopping them. They danced and sang along with everything we did. It was touching to see the foster families interact with them and even better to see the kids dance and laugh with each other. One thing that really struck me was how the older kids reacted to the characters we have travel with us. Of course, we expect the little kids to love it, but I was pleasantly surprised to see the teenagers in the room, who started out trying to look cool, go bonkers when Santa came out.

I overheard staff members discussing what they had just seen to volunteers. I heard one of them say that this was above and beyond what any of them were expecting. One mentioned how it reminded her of why she got into social work. But even better, one said how many of the kids don't have positive holiday memories...or any at all. She believed that this one event, this one moment, would go a long way in replacing some of those bad memories with positive ones.

Hudson Milestones — Jersey City, NJ

Help! I can't wipe this goofy smile off my face, thanks to this Holiday Express event! This party had it all: dancing, laughing, singing, hugging. If I had to define Holiday Express by one event, this would be it. Hudson Milestones serves adults with mental disabilities, and, as the guests filed in, you could feel the electricity in the air. Everyone was just so happy and chatting excitedly about what songs they wanted to hear and which characters they wanted to see. When the music finally started, virtually everyone was on the dance floor. It was so packed with people, our costumed characters had a hard time navigating it. There were so many people who wanted to sing "Feliz Navidad" that we must have gone around 15 times to accommodate everyone. We had the longest "Love Train" I've ever seen circling the room for the entirety of the classic O'Jays song. And why not just throw in "I Saw Her Standing There" for good measure? Finally, we ended with a particularly inspired version of "White Christmas."

I can't remember a time where there was so much energy or when you could look around a room and see no one sitting down. They were just so happy. And seeing that couldn't help but make me happy.

Eva's Village — Paterson, NJ

Man, I love this place! Every year, I'm blown away by the energy and holiday spirit in the room. Eva's Village caters to folks whom life has thrown some difficult challenges. It is an organization that helps feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, treat the addicted, and provide crucial services to individuals and families. As a result, we see a wide variety of people and a lot of young children.

The great thing about Eva's is that whatever is happening in any of our lives, it completely evaporates whenever you walk in the door. At these sorts of events, it's important to not only show the adults a good time, but also make sure the kids have a happy holiday season. Everyone there - children, parents, friends, and acquaintances - were having a great time together. Tonight was one of those nights where we received just as much cheer as we gave out. I love when that happens.

Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital — Morris Plains, NJ

This place is tough. There are some really severely ill people who live at Greystone Psychiatric Hospital, and, in many cases, it's hard to know if they are enjoying themselves. Fortunately, the majority of our audience today just wanted to have a good time and we were happy to oblige. At Holiday Express events, the band encourages audience members to sing. Every now and then, we come across someone who has a great voice, but it's more about participation and allowing the people to use their voices to express themselves. They usually start out timid until they realize everyone around them is cheering them on and encouraging them to continue. By the end of their turn, they are all in. I've found that this encouragement makes all the difference in some of these venues. It doesn't matter what the ability level is or what the person's situation may be – just sing! It's fun!



more Notes.....

Joseph's House — Camden, NJ

Joseph's House in Camden offers the homeless a shelter to sleep and place to eat; a refuge from the streets so they can get back on their feet. The first thing you see when you walk in is a sign asking that anyone who stays there confiscate their weapons and drugs at the door. The streets of Camden can be pretty rough, according to Richard, one of the guests at today's event. He explained to me that he used to work at the Camden Department of Public Works before he was recently laid off. Before then, he held several jobs and was laid off a few times, sometimes ending up on the street. Despite this dire circumstance, Richard was upbeat and positive. He talked animatedly about his wife of 32 years, who he insisted was still as lovely to him as the day he met her. He told me that he believed everything happened for a reason and remained hopeful that he would find work again. He told me he was saving his food for his wife for when she got there, but then got up from his chair and I didn't see him again.

The music began and the energy in the room was palpable. I noticed several people wiping tears from their eyes after singer Mary's stunning and impassioned rendition of "O Holy Night." I was happy to see some smiling and laughing out there. Who knows when the last was that they were able to do that? After the event, the room was cleared out to set up cots so the guests could sleep over. After the show, Mary said that was awesome, because all the good vibes in that room could be soaked up by the guests overnight. I couldn't agree more.

New Lisbon Developmental Center — New Lisbon, NJ

This one is always powerful. New Lisbon is a state-funded facility where the residents are older and many have no family to speak of. Before the event, we went around to carol in the different cottages on the campus for all the people who weren't mobile enough to get to the all-purpose room for the event. The cottages themselves are made of cinder block, painted white and a light brown, with bright fluorescent lights. Very...clinical, I guess. But the staff of New Lisbon really went all out to make sure their patients were in the Christmas spirit. Each cottage was decorated with lights and reindeer and fireplace posters. When we left to head back to the event, our bandleader BethAnne commented that it truly is a little family atmosphere they create. Our New Lisbon staff escort agreed and said that's what they try to do every day.

The event was filled with energy, with a diverse set list that not only hit on the holiday favorites, but Chubby Checker and James Brown tunes, as well. For me, the best moment of the day was watching singer Mary lead a choir in "Silent Night." It was a truly beautiful moment. Something about the energy of the song and Mary's singing really drew everyone to her. There are sometimes you just have to get out of the way and let a great moment happen. That was one of them.

Trinitas Regional Medical Center — Paterson, New Jersey

Trinitas is an older building in downtown Elizabeth that houses older, mentally handicapped people. The building is definitely beginning to show its age, which is why I was pleasantly surprised that the awesome staff had made up the little basement where we were hosting the event into a proverbial winter wonderland. There were balloons everywhere, Christmas-related pictures, the tables were decorated, and some of the guests wore their finest holiday sweaters. These people were ready to rock, and rock they did!

One gentleman, named Albio, was sitting right at the front table. He was quiet at first, but came out of his shell during singer/bassist Mark's stunning rendition of Nat King Cole's "The Christmas Song" and sang along at the top of his lungs. I've mentioned it before, but it's always nice to remember again that singing at a Holiday Express show isn't about being technically proficient — it's about using your voice.

Of course, when Santa came out and made his appearance, it brought the house down. At one point, he went over to a woman who had been dancing and waving to the band all night and just held her hand. I could see tears in her eyes as she looked back at Santa. I've seen moments like that quite a bit over the years. But you know what? It never gets old.

Straight & Narrow — Paterson, NJ

This was a big crowd, and the one thing they all had in common was that, at one point or another in their lives, they had hit rock bottom and sought help. But the nice thing about Straight & Narrow is that they were all also well on their way back up. I swear you'll never see a happier or more grateful group. Nor will you find people who could match the energy. From the first downbeat, almost the entire room was on their feet and dancing. They chanted and clapped and gave standing ovations to people who won raffle prizes. They embraced and reveled in every aspect of the event. Even The Grinch (me!) was greeted with hugs and laughter. There were lots of kids, as well. It's very important to remember that the kids we see at these sorts of events are going through their own problems, too, which is why it is so vital that we deliver a great party for them.

We also had a bona fide "Holiday Express moment." For those not familiar with the term, a "Holiday Express moment" sometimes happens middle of the festivities that defines why we do this and what this is really all about. Every volunteer has a story like this - and we'll gladly tell you all about them if you ask. As the event was ending, some of the guests expressed disappointment that the night was over. So we thought, why not one more? What followed was a rousing rendition of "This Little Light of Mine" from the Straight & Narrow Gospel Choir, backed by the band. The choir was powerful, but the collective voices of the entire room were even stronger. These people have been through so much and it gave the hopeful lyrics of the song a deeper meaning. The sound filled the room to the top. It was like you were being bathed in the shining light depicted in the song.

St. Ann's Soup Kitchen — Newark, NJ

The final day of the Holiday Express season couldn't have been any better than the one at St. Ann's in Newark. When we arrived, there were people lined up around the corner in the pouring rain, waiting for the doors to open so they could go inside. They all acted with the same graciousness, humility, and gratitude that have come to define these kinds of events. It was good to see so many smiling faces to start off Christmas Eve 2014. When I got down into the church basement, I saw that the Holiday Express and St. Ann's volunteers had festively decorated each table and the room was filled with the smell of pancakes. It was going to be a good day.

One thing I noticed was the amount of kids at this event, versus similar Christmas Eve events I've done in the past. It can be sad to see, because you wonder what their lives are like outside of the hour and a half to two hours they are with us. But the smiles on all their faces wiped that feeling away quickly. They didn't just want to dance...they wanted to sing and play the band's instruments. I've never seen a group of kids so curious to learn about every instrument. I think we may have spawned a new musician or two. How great would it be if one of them ended up in the Holiday Express band one day?

A cool thing happened at the end. We started to play "All Alone on Christmas" for the last time in 2014 to close out the event. Then Santa and Mrs. Claus walked out, with no fanfare or formal introduction. If you've been to a public or private Holiday Express event, then you understand that the introduction of Santa is always a BIG DEAL. But this time he just came out unannounced and mingled among the people. The kids freaked out, of course, and immediately mobbed him. But to me, it was symbolically saying that no matter what our past or current situations - musician, volunteer, guest, or even the big guy in the red suit himself - everyone in the room were all the same. And if everyone left today maybe a little happier, feeling that they had been treated with dignity and respect...well, isn't that what this is all about in the first place?

The Deron School — Union, NJ

The Deron School in Union is a place for special needs kids, ages five to 21. As the students came filing in, they stayed in the back of the room and seemed hesitant to come to the front. We still had a few minutes before the music started, so I walked over and asked, "What's everyone doing back here?" I waved them to the front of the room, right in front of the band. When the music started, as it always seems to happen at these events, the apprehension melted away. The students danced and sang along with everything we did. It was a blast.

Later, I took notice of the students as they were lining up to leave. Despite coming in a tad nervous, they were now laughing, chatting, and dancing, despite there being no music. I even saw a few instances of a few students hugging each other or high fiving. It served as a gentle reminder to me that, while Holiday Express (and Santa) ensures that everyone gets a present after each event, what we are really doing is spreading holiday cheer.



TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS IN A MONTH AND A HALF

It seems like everyone knows the holiday classic “Twelve Days of Christmas” - but you haven’t really enjoyed singing it until you’ve witnessed the rollicking, rowdy, incomparably festive rendition presented by Holiday Express, with a lot of help from our enthusiastic audiences as they loudly sing along!

There may officially be only twelve days of Christmas - but for Holiday Express, those days take on a unique life of their own, over and over again, throughout the months of November and December.







WHAT IS A GIVING PARTNER?

The Holiday Express Giving Partner program offers a unique opportunity for individuals, families, neighborhoods, co-workers, small or large businesses, or any other group to select a very personalized gift for those that we visit. Each year, we ask every facility to submit a Wish List, with items that are beyond their financial means. The Giving Partner Program's goal is for every location, in addition to all the gift bags we bring for their clients and residents, to receive "something extra" from their Wish List. The items they request include various price points and address an array of specific needs, ranging from modest necessities such as pots and pans or arts and crafts supplies to more substantial requests such as major appliances or computer equipment, and just about everything in between.



This Wish List is posted on the Holiday Express website (under "How to Help") at the start of each season, where you will find a master spreadsheet with all of the new season's locations and their desired items (including cost and even where it's available), or you may search through your favorite locations individually. You are sure to find that special something that tugs at your heart, which you - or perhaps a group that you know - can claim as your Giving Partner gift. If it's more convenient, you can also make a tax deductible monetary donation to Holiday Express and we will purchase the selected gift on your behalf. Giving Partners are invited to attend the event to present their gift personally, if they so desire, and to experience firsthand the true meaning of the holiday spirit and the magic of a Holiday Express event - often forging very personal, heartwarming relationships between Giving Partners and their gift recipients.

We are enormously grateful to all of the Giving Partners who so generously participated in our 2014 season. Please see the complete list of participants on our website at www.holidayexpress.org.

EVERYONE LOVES A RAFFLE! "And the winner is..."

Among the many fun surprises that bring delight to the audiences we visit are the raffles we do at some of our events. The prizes are usually giant gift bags overflowing with favorite items that have been collected throughout the year with each audience in mind - all made possible through the generous donations of people like you. Would you like to help us make our special guests feel like winners, and contribute some prizes? The most requested raffle items include:

- Winter jackets - fleece, wool blends, and windbreaker styles for men and women
- Hoodies - solids, zipper, or pullover for women
- Winter hats, gloves, and socks for men and women
- Fleece blankets
- Pajama pants and sweatpants (fleece or nylon) for men
- Flannel shirts for men
- Pajama pants, flannel nightgowns, velour warmup suits for women
- Slippers
- Sweaters for women
- Children's clothing, sizes 2T-12, such as: winter jackets, hats and gloves, sweaters, and sweatshirts

Worth noting: items with pro and college team logos always are a big hit! (Yankees, Mets, Giants, Jets, Rangers, Devils, Rutgers, Seton Hall, Phillies, etc.) Please give us a call at 732-544-8010 if you have any questions, or stop by the Holiday Express warehouse to drop off your donations!





HOLIDAY EXPRESS: *We Are Family*

Thank you to our volunteer, Elf Paul, for this timeless and beautiful personal perspective – a reminder of how those that we visit are not just like family; they often truly are family.

“For those who think the holiday season starts too soon when the shopping malls have their Christmas displays up before Halloween, how would you like to spend your summer watching “Fred Claus”? Well, that was what my 11-year-old son and I watched repeatedly this past summer. You see, my son is autistic and loves watching DVDs – usually the same one over and over and over again for weeks. As we get closer to the Holiday Express visit to the Children’s Center of Monmouth County, a school for children with multiple disabilities, it will be “The Grinch” that we watch...over and over again...because he will be anxiously waiting for his annual

meeting with that famous green character.

Like many of the people we visit, my son’s only holiday party invitation will come from Holiday Express. Unfortunately, most children with disabilities don’t get party invitations. Nor do the “adult orphans” that Holiday Express will visit in developmental centers, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, AIDS facilities, etc. I often say that Christmas and Hanukkah are just dates on a calendar for most of these people. Their holiday will be on the day that the Holiday Express tour bus pulls up, and for several hours, music, dancing, food, and gifts will allow the joy and magic of the season to fill their lives, if just for a while.

If you haven’t seen the movie “Fred Claus,” part of the plot centers around Santa not being able to deliver presents on Christmas Eve, so someone needs to step into that very important role. In the movie, it was unimaginable that Santa wouldn’t arrive on Christmas Eve. It’s equally unimaginable that Holiday Express wouldn’t be able to deliver the magic of the holiday season to the more than 16,000 people they visit each year. For most of these people, the holiday season won’t start until Holiday Express gets there.”



Working Relationships

It’s been said that you make a living by what you get, and you make a life by what you give. We are thankful for area businesses that take that adage to heart, lending support and forming strong bonds that help turn their employees into very special Holiday Express volunteers, such as our friend Neil M. from Travelers Insurance Company, who explains...

“It’s been seven years since a relationship with Holiday Express started at Travelers, and so much has evolved since the first time we met as a committee to identify a local charity to support. Employees who never knew each other started to bond as we did our first of many annual warehouse days, stuffing gift bags and learning about the mission of Holiday Express. It soon became obvious that this was a perfect organization to support, as it had such a local impact and a strong mission. This proved to be a wonderful opportunity for people who wanted to get involved with a meaningful charitable effort through a corporate-sponsored endeavor. As interest mounted, we investigated various avenues of financial support through the Travelers Foundation, which provides grants as well as matching gifts for hours served by Travelers volunteers, plus matching employees’ donations. We saw the opportunity to venture into co-sponsored events that Travelers employees initiated with Holiday



Express and now look forward to doing every year. We sponsor “Art Days” each October at the A. Harry Moore School, starting off their holiday season by creating seasonal art with students. This year, we assisted them in creating world-class name badges that they proudly wore at the Holiday Express event, and shared with the band leaders they’ve come to love. Other events included bringing a group of students from A. Harry Moore School to the Newark Museum for a tour and some hands-on art instruction, and organizing a visit for a group of students from Harbor School to the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, where we brought in an art instructor to teach clay sculpting and hosted a tour of this significant gallery. Keeping with the art education theme, a collection of artwork from young artists at Matheny Hospital was displayed at the Count Basie Theatre for the 2014 Holiday Express concert.

There is a strong desire within the New Jersey business community to support local giving organizations and there is often a structure in place to really have impact. Employees create networks when involved in a worthy cause, which generates powerful efforts as a group, from both a volunteer and financial aspect. We encourage anyone to seek out the assistance that is available through their employers.”

Need help thinking “outside the box” on ways that your corporation can support Holiday Express? We’ve got plenty of good ideas that may fit your criteria! **Call Holiday Express at 732-544-8010 or visit our website at www.HolidayExpress.org to learn more.**

Thank you to everyone for the many ways that you help support the Holiday Express mission!



SPECIAL HELPERS NEEDED

Can you, or someone you know, help us...

Sign? Holiday Express is looking for a volunteer to come and do sign language at our events.

Speak Spanish? We are looking for volunteers who can translate at some of our events.

Drive a truck? No CDL license needed. We are looking for volunteers that have experience driving trucks. We transport items in a rented box truck during our season.

Please contact our office for more information about any of these ways you can help!

Keep in Touch!

It's easy to stay updated on all that's happening with Holiday Express, not just during the holiday season, but throughout the year, and we'd love to hear from you!



Be sure to visit our website at www.holidayexpress.org and "like" our Facebook page at Holiday Express.



You can also send us a tweet at www.twitter.com/Holiday-Express and view our videos at [www.youtube.com/HolidayExpressElf!](http://www.youtube.com/HolidayExpressElf)



And of course, you may always give us a call at 732-544-8010. Our warehouse is located at 968 Shrewsbury Avenue, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724.



Holiday Express is a registered 501(c)(3) organization, and all donations are tax deductible.

Holiday Express accepts online donations using any major credit card or a PayPal account. Your payments are made using a secure connection and your credit card information is safe. Please provide your email address when you make a donation so we can email you a receipt for your tax records. You may also donate by phone with a credit card. Call our office at 732-544-8010. In addition, you may send a check or credit card information to us at: Holiday Express, 968 Shrewsbury Avenue, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724.

Perhaps you'd consider a memorial or honorary gift? A donation to Holiday Express is a thoughtful way to honor someone whose life has been impacted by our mission. Holiday Express will promptly send a note to the honoree or family acknowledging your gift.

In-kind donations of goods and services are extremely valuable to us. Anything with a value is income for a charity and tax deductible for the donor. The gift bags we give away to each individual we visit is one of our largest expenses. Our goal is to get all items for our 16,000+ gift bags donated. All items must be brand new; no amount is too big or too small! Auction items are also needed for our fundraisers. Our annual Clambake and Golf Outing rely heavily on donated gifts for the silent and live auctions.

For ideas on the types of items we'd most welcome, please visit our website and look under "[How to Help!](#)"

Does Your Company Match Your Charitable Gifts?

Employee matching gifts (also known as matching funds) are grants an employer makes to match its employees' charitable contributions. Usually associated with corporate grantmakers, employee matching gifts often are dollar-for-dollar, but some companies will give double or even triple the original donation. Some companies may also give matching gifts for employees' volunteer efforts. Some companies match their employee's donations.

Please check and see if your company will consider matching your gift to Holiday Express, and make your generosity go farther!

CHARACTER STUDY: BEHIND THE COSTUME

The costumed characters – Frosty, Rudolph, The Grinch, Cookie Monster, Elmo, Santa and Mrs. Claus – have been Holiday Express staples from almost the very beginning. The characters are great ice-breakers and really know how to get the party started. Many times, the clients at the events are shy or unsure what Holiday Express is all about. But once any of the characters comes out, inhibitions seem to melt away and smiles appear. All of the many “hats” a Holiday Express volunteer wears, my personal favorite is a top hat, the chapeau of the famous Frosty the Snowman!

Being inside one of those costumes is a feeling like no other. While folks may be hesitant to interact with a regular volunteer, seeing a big furry character seems to break down barriers and allow everyone to engage, dancing with Frosty or wrapping their arms around these big balls of fur. For the volunteer inside, the experience is quite liberating, as it gives you a license to be silly and do goofy things you may not do if people could actually see your face. To me, there is no better way to spread joy!

– Phyllis M.



It's not easy being green...but boy, is it rewarding! The Holiday Express Grinch costume can be claustrophobic and difficult to move in, but once the music starts and I clomp out into the crowd, I wouldn't trade places with anyone, anywhere.

New volunteers are reminded not to reach out to guests, instead allowing them to initiate contact, but most times I don't get three steps before I am engulfed in hugs and the first few minutes are usually a love scrum, with squeals of glee. And it is not just kids; some of the biggest, toughest guys in the room break out in big silly grins when the Grinch approaches them – despite Tim's warning about the Grinch's severe case of contagious cooties. The most rewarding encounters are often with the less mobile and less engaged guests in the back of the room. There is nothing like the wonder on a blind child's face when she touches the Grinch's fur or feels his touch on her cheek, or the joyous bouncing or arm-waving of a handicapped guest in a wheelchair. I am especially touched by the looks on caregivers' faces when their charges react beyond their usual capabilities. I have “sung” as Cookie Monster, danced with abandon as Frosty, and trotted out as Rudolph, but none of the characters seems to connect with guests as well as the big, ugly, ungainly, misunderstood Grinch.

– Natalie E.

ALL HANDS ON DECK – A



We have all sorts of volunteers at Holiday Express, with each one playing an equally vital part in making our mission come to life and everyone pitching in to lend a hand whenever and wherever they're needed most. For weeks in advance and all throughout the holiday season right up until party time, the behind-the-scenes efforts are what allow Holiday Express events to run as smoothly and seamlessly as possible and provide our clients and their caregivers an upbeat, stress-free celebration that they so richly deserve. From the warehouse elves who busily pack thousands of gift bags with assembly-line-efficiency to the tireless hauling of equipment and supplies onto trucks and buses to the dedicated rehearsals of the musical volunteers to setting up and cleaning up the event venues, Holiday Express is truly a team effort.



A Behind-the-Scenes Look



It Seems Like Only Yesterday...

Delivering the gift of human kindness to countless audiences, both young and old, has undoubtedly kept all of us - volunteers and clients alike - joyfully young at heart! Here are some glimpses back across the years from seasons past.





A TASTE OF KINDNESS



At Holiday Express events, we not only provide music and fun, along with gift bags filled with life's necessities, for everyone. We serve thousands of meals, as well, which are made possible with help from some fantastic supporters.

This past 2014 Holiday Express season, **Jersey Mike's Subs** donated an incredible 6,500 delicious subs, which brought many smiles to those we served. We love Jersey Mike's Subs!

The Holiday Express mission receives amazing support throughout the year from **McLoone's Restaurants**, chefs, staff, and family. This year, they graciously donated more than 3,000 delicious 'sit-down' holiday meals to the people we visited. At McLoone's Restaurants, the art of philanthropy starts from the top and trickles down. We can't thank them enough.

Again this past season, **WindMill** generously donated to us. This year, their wonderful donation grew to 1,000 delicious 'Jersey Shore' hot dogs, together with condiments.

Thank you, **Merry-Makers Caterers**, for donating over 350 hot meals and bringing happiness to so many.

Welcome to our Holiday Express family and thank you very much for the tremendous support from **Salt Creek Grille**, Rumson, who donated more than 700 hot and yummy meals this past season.

Another welcome to our Holiday Express family and thanks very much for the generous support from **Joe Leone's**, who donated over 200 hot and delicious meals.

And finally, thank you to **Wakefern Food Corporation** for all of the soda and water they donated for our shows throughout the season, and thank you to **Frito-Lay** for the donation of chips that our clients enjoyed all season, also!

*We extend a big **THANK YOU** to all of our outstanding food establishment donors, and we hope you will show your support, in turn, by becoming their customer!*



SUPPORTERS *and* SPONSORS

IN KIND & OTHER SUPPORTERS

Athlete's Alley
 Atlantic City Casinos
 Beachside Productions
 Budget Truck Rentals
 Circle of Love bracelet makers at Easter Seals
 Colgate Palmolive
 Craft makers at Equesta
 Craig Kiely and Darryn Murphy Designs
 Down to Basics
 Frito-Lay
 GNI Products
 Guest Supply -Sysco
 Jersey Mike's Subs
 Joe Leone's
 Kathryn Barnett School of Dance & Allegro Dance Academy
 Komar
 L'oreal
 Lowy's Moving Service
 McLoone's Restaurants
 McMann Systems
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 United Rentals
 Wakefern Food Corp.
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 The Windmill
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Grantors:

TD Bank Charitable Foundation
 The Faith and James Knight Foundation
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 The Helen Snyder Foundation
 The Kurr Foundation
 The Monmouth Park Charity Fund
 The Perricone Family Foundation
 The Sandy Hill Foundation
 The Spano Foundation
 The Travelers Foundation
 St. George's-by-the-River

HOLIDAY EXPRESS CONCERT AT THE RED BANK TOWN LIGHTING November 28, 2014

Sponsored by

Jersey Mike's Subs and
 Shore Point Distributing Company

www.HolidayExpress.org

HOLIDAY EXPRESS BENEFIT CONCERT NJPAC December 11, 2014

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Investors Bank

Santa Sponsor

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HOLIDAY EXPRESS BENEFIT CONCERT COUNT BASIE THEATRE December 18, 2014

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A.J.D. Construction Company, Inc. -
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Trucks generously supplied by Avis



Blankets generously supplied by Komar



Paper goods generously supplied by Ronstan Paper



Boxes generously supplied by Lowy's Moving Service

Thank you, also,
 to all our amazing
 Giving Partners
 for their generous and
 very personalized gifts
 to those we visit!
 See the list
 on our website at
[www.holidayexpress.org!](http://www.holidayexpress.org)

HOLIDAY EXPRESS *by the* NUMBERS

EXPENSES

TOTAL: \$1,141,935

\$148,551 **13%**
Special Events
Performances
FUNDRAISING

\$89,236 **8%**
Administrative
Insurance
Technology
Utilities
Supplies
**MANAGEMENT
& GENERAL**

79%
\$904,148
PROGRAM
Mission Goods
and Services
Gift Bag Items
Transportation
Sound
Food
Warehouse Space
Scholarships

Source:
Audited Financials,
IRS Form 990

ESTABLISHED
IN **1993** | USING **1,700**
VOLUNTEERS ANNUALLY

DISTRIBUTING MORE THAN
300,000
GIFT BAGS SO FAR

RECEIVING
NO
GOVERNMENT FUNDING,
DUES, OR FEES

PERFORMING MORE THAN
990
MUSICAL EVENTS IN
7 STATES
TO DATE | SERVING AN
UNDERSERVED
POPULATION-
THOSE WITH A
DIVERSITY OF
SPECIAL NEEDS-
FOR FREE

68 IN **43**
EVENTS : DAYS

20,000
ENTERTAINED AND FED

8 NEW
ORGANIZATIONS

REVENUE

TOTAL: \$1,174,287

1% **\$5,833**
OTHER
Sales

15% **\$181,351***
PERFORMANCES
Count Basie
NJPAC
Red Bank Tree Lighting

15% **\$179,448***
SPECIAL EVENTS
Golf Outing
Clambake

28%
IN-KIND
\$325,318
Gift Bag Items
Goods
Food & Beverages
Advertising

41%
DIRECT
PUBLIC
SUPPORT
\$482,337
Financial
Donations
Grants
Foundations
Awards

*net of direct costs

Thank you for helping us deliver the priceless gift of human kindness!



HOLIDAY EXPRESS®

968 SHREWSBURY AVENUE
TINTON FALLS, NJ 07724

WWW.HOLIDAYEXPRESS.ORG

SAVE THE DATES!

7.20.15 – ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC



RED BANK TOWN LIGHTING

NOVEMBER 27

NJPAC

DECEMBER 10

COUNT BASIE

DECEMBER 17

9.20.15 – SUNSET BENEFIT CLAMBAKE



DELIVERING THE GIFT OF HUMAN KINDNESS

VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.HOLIDAYEXPRESS.ORG

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