

Helping Holiday Express Deliver

Volunteer Spotlight

The extravert and the introvert! Meet Jeanne Westendorf, powerful vocalist and life of the party; at the other end of the spectrum, meet Jeff Fraller, quiet and determined, a strong man in the background.



Jeanne Westendorf

In 1994 my friend and co-worker at Riverview Hospital, Amy Robinson, invited me to a Holiday Express concert at Tradewinds. There was a snow storm that night and Bruce Springsteen showed up. The band was big and amazing. There was so much energy on stage and I found the whole concept quite inspiring.

Knowing that I am "crafty," the following year Amy asked me if I wanted to go with her and volunteer with Holiday Express. After the meeting, Tim told general volunteers to sign up over here and band/singer types to sign up over there. Something inside me said sign up for the band and the rest is history. I always tell people it is the best thing I ever did.

Before I joined Holiday Express, I was a "closet singer." Tim and the other musicians gave me the love and support I needed to get out and sing all the time, not just at Christmas. And what better front man then to learn from but Mr. Tim McLoone.

I can't believe it but I have been singing with the band for the last fifteen years! At events, I also love to help out with the crafts before the band starts. As far as my favorites events – there are so many – but to name a few, A. Harry Moore, Trenton Soup Kitchen, School for Children and Matheny.

I always leave an event feeling like we made a difference in the peoples' lives that we visited, even though it may have only been for a few hours. I have made some great friendships through Holiday Express as well.

In my family, I am the last of five; we are all close and live in Monmouth County. I have two beautiful nieces and six dashing nephews (they will kill me for saying that!). My parents always

encouraged us to volunteer our time. My sister Tara volunteered with Holiday Express a few years ago as a face painter, and worked on the dinner dance. Soon after, my brother Jack and his wife Patti became volunteers, which always make the bus trip home that much more fun.

My two girlfriends joined a couple years after me, Kim Devine and Karen Butler. Donna Edington, Program Director loved them because they were willing to put on the crazy costumes. They are now raising gorgeous little babies! I am so happy for them.

I work as the office manager for Specialty Surgical Associates in Shrewsbury. The practice specializes in Laparoscopic Surgery. I have been working in the medical field for the last fifteen years, and became a certified procedural coder five years ago.

I have the best of both worlds with my music. I have two cover bands, **The JW Trio** and **Miss Jeanne and The Fakers**. The trio

is light and easy, and when I want to rock out I have the Fakers to play with. I love to sing with both bands and all the musicians have become great friends of mine.

And for once in my life I am in love – we met a few years ago. Good things really do come to those who wait. So when I'm not working, I'm hanging around Red Bank with my honey, Timmy. Yes, there are two Timmys in my life! I have to be very careful when sending sexy texts since their names are obviously near each other on my phone. Ha! Ha!

There have been so many memorable moments over the last fifteen years. I love going out into the audience to sing "Candles Burning Low" and handing the microphone over to someone and hearing the voice that comes out – so pure and incredible. Some

of the most fun moments occur after the event on the bus ride home. We've often yelled to Fred, our fearless bus driver, "don't stop Fred, keep the bus going, we're having too much fun."



Jeff Fraller

I first heard about Holiday Express back in 1996 from my sister-in-law, Helen Doyle. She called me up one December evening to tell me about a fundraising concert that Holiday Express was putting on at the Tradewinds.

My wife, Jacqueline, and I went to the Tradewinds concert, and were impressed by the music. But we were even more impressed by the message the group was relaying to the audience. This message – about “delivering the gift of human kindness” – was later reinforced by listening to Helen talk at Christmas dinner about her Holiday Express experience. It really piqued our interest.

The following year I asked how I could get my Boy Scout troop involved. Before I knew it, “elves” were delivering loads of candy to my house for me to bring to the Boy Scout meetings. The Scouts would put bags of candy together that go into the gift bags Holiday Express provides to clients, and I would deliver them to the warehouse.

Jacqueline and I volunteered together for the first year. By the second year our daughter, Jessica (now age 10), was born so Jacqueline kindly let me continue volunteering with my Holiday Express family. A few years later, our son, Joseph (now age 7), was born. I can’t wait until they are older and the four of us can all volunteer together at an event.

My interests include hiking, bike riding, basketball, coaching my son’s sports teams and Scouting. I serve as an Assistant Scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 148 in Long Branch.

At Holiday Express events, I have performed a variety of duties – handling out gift bags, serving food, or donning any costume character I can fit into. I serve as Event Manager for several events during our Season. I enjoy managing events at new places. It is very challenging figuring out the logistics for a first time event as you meet with the director of the facility. However, the best part of being somewhere for the first time is that neither Holiday Express or the guests quite know what to expect. The reaction after each first time event is always the same. We can’t wait until next year!

I am a CPA and work for Lawrence B Goodman & Co., PA, an accounting and consulting firm that specializes in Dental Practices. Because of my experience as a CPA, I was invited to join the Holiday Express Board of Trustees and serve as treasurer, a position I have held for the past four years. I obtain a great deal of satisfaction dealing with the inner working of the organization and see first-hand how wonderful and committed each Board/Committee member is to our cause.



One of my most memorable Holiday Express experiences occurred the first time we traveled to St. John’s Soup Kitchen in Newark. It was Christmas Eve morning and it had snowed a little through the night. As we got off the bus we saw this was literally a soup KITCHEN. There was no room for the guests to eat inside. They took their food and either sat on the curb in the parking lot or stood at makeshift tables fastened to a fence, lightpole or street sign.



The sound crew had already set up the equipment and microphones, with wires running all over the snow. We found out that our drummer could not make it. We all wondered if everyone was willing to stand around in a freezing parking lot and listen to the small troupe of volunteers we had that day.

As soon as the music started the tiny crowd started to build. The “elves” were encouraging the guests to dance and the band was working hard getting the group

involved by passing around the microphone. As I witnessed this, the first thought that came to mind was “I hope no one gets electrocuted from all these wires running over the snow.”

My second thought was, ‘Wow, I guess everyone knows the words to “Silent Night.”’ And this thought was confirmed after the show as we were sitting on the bus waiting to pull away. The priest came on board with tears in his eyes and said, “You have given us such a wonderful Christmas present. I want to return the favor by telling you something remarkable that just happened.” He continued, “There was a young man who has been visiting St. John’s for several months now. He has never made eye contact nor said a word to anyone. We have tried to get information from him, so we can apply for benefits on his behalf, to no avail. That young man was the second person to sing when you passed around the microphone during “Silent Night.” We did not think he could speak.”

I think of that moment every Christmas Eve and every time I hear that song. That event has evolved a lot since then. We pledged never to have those guests sit on a snowy curb while we are there. Every Christmas Eve since that first show, the guests have been served a full sit-down meal, courtesy of the staff at McLoone’s, under a large heated tent...with a band with a drummer.

This is just one story from countless events over the years that epitomizes what Holiday Express is all about.