

## Volunteers Delivering the Gift of Human Kindness

Issue 13 Spring 2005









## to Serve those in Need

mong the highlights at the Annual Dinner Dance was the introduction of some of the 2004 scholarship recipients. The latest winners of the Lauren Townsend Award, Little Steven Creative Arts Award, and the Andrew Spencer Award were present to receive their certificates, express their appreciation, and even sing with the band. Also featured was the debut of the Asbury Park Boys & Girls Chorus, comprised of sixty children of elementary to high school age, from the Monmouth County Boys & Girls Clubs.

This past season was the first time Holiday Express visited *all* of the state-run mental health facilities in New Jersey. Other newcomer facilities included Holy Apostle Soup Kitchen and Bowery Residents Committee, both in New York City; and Cathedral Kitchen of Camden, NJ.

At the warehouse, "the elves packed 12,738 gifts bags for 6,410 men; 3,401 for women and 2,927 for children and teens," said Gift Coordinator Joan Mercer. "They also put together 295 caregiver gifts to thank those people who take care of our friends during the other 364 days of the year."

"Who are these elves? There were morning workers, weekend workers, and hundreds of junior volunteers (46 one afternoon!). There were elves on call for when the 18-wheeler trucks made their deliveries. There was another group that helped load and unload the Avis truck. Most days there was also a volunteer that took the van to pick up a donation or purchase supplies." Joan added, "Thank you to everyone for your many hours of hard work, as well as your good ideas on how to make things better. The warehouse has always been a happy place and it just keeps getting better."



Dear Friends,

I am often asked what Holiday Express does during its "off season." As most of you know, we are very busy organizing for the upcoming year. This includes preparing for the Golf Outing, the Dinner Dance, and getting together the event schedule, among others. However, this year brings an exciting new initiative: "Express Makeover." Derived from the TV show, "Extreme Makeover," our intrepid new volunteer group will select deserving locations that need "makeover" help. The first will be St. Mark's Soup Kitchen in Keansburg. They need a handicapped accessable entry ramp and their pantry is literally falling down. After we receive municipal approvals, we will begin work later this summer and will need lots of help. (Any of you who have seen how

"handy" I am will know that I will be providing entertainment.)

So, get out your tool box!

It is the mission of Holiday Express to deliver music, food, gifts and friendship to the mentally disabled, those living with illnesses such as cancer and AIDS, the homeless, the isolated elderly and others in need of the gift of human kindness during the holiday season and throughout the year.

#### Holiday Express Communications Group Contributors

John Bollinger, Peter DeMarco, Alan Grant, Delores Holmes, Layonne Holmes, Denise Lang, Frank McGarry, Joan Mercer, Krista Newbert, Denise O'Hara, Joe Petillo, Amy Robinson Nancy Sabino, Mike Sodano, Barbara Willis

Newsletter Graphic Design by Jill Weiss

Photos by Scott Longfield and HolEx friends

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968 Shrewsbury Ave., Tinton Falls, NJ 07724 Tel: (732) 544-8010 Fax: (732) 544-8020 email: holexpress@comcast.net http://www.holidayexpress.org

#### Continuing the Mission (continued from page 1)

In addition to the 50 events on the schedule, the elves provided gifts for 7 other programs in need, including 75 gift bags for Sylvia's Place, a shelter for homeless teens in New York City.

Holiday Express also helped to fulfill some of the wish lists that were left unpaired with Giving Partners. These included:

Monmouth Day Care Center received 24 "sippy" cups and a digital camera with extra memory and photo paper Ladacin Network received 2 scanners and two fax machines Lunch Break received a commercial potato peeler North Jersey Developmental Center received two outdoor grills.

In between these visits were the public performances that encourage awareness and support, not only for this organization, but other charitable organizations as well. Holiday Express was again a part of NJ101.5's Holiday Extravaganza, headed by Big Joe Henry and The Rock and Roll Music Fund, at Jenkinson's in Pt. Pleasant, NJ. The now annual Count Basie Theatre performance was again sold out and full of friends and family.

The Holiday Express band served as backup for John Bon Jovi and Darlene Love at WPLJ's annual telethon for Blythedale Children's Hospital. Performing with Love, the original singer of the Holiday Express theme song, "Alone on Christmas," was a dream come true. Other artists performing that day included John Mayer and Rob Thomas. Days later, the band and crew took the stage at Continental Airlines Arena, joined by the child stars of the Matheny School and the Asbury Park Boys & Girls Chorus. They not only stole the show, they stole hearts, too. This concert also showcased an uncanny Beatles performance by The Mahoney Brothers. Members Jay Swanson and Mike Mahoney are best known as part of Holiday Express' hard-working sound and light crew. Mike offered the added shocker of an Elvis performance even the King would have appreciated!

In February, 2005, the annual Polar Bear Plunge took place to benefit Special Olympics. Over \$500,000.00 was raised at the event held at Jenkinson's and broadcast by NJ101.5. The brave souls representing team Holiday Express were Al Lundgren, Tony Cosentino, Drew Kyne and Amy Robinson.

The Sgt. Pat King 5K race in March, 2005, held annually in Long Branch, benefited the scholarship funds of Shore Regional High School, Long Branch High School and Holiday Express. "It was a great turnout with over 650 runners and walkers. Holiday Expressers were there, not just running and walking, but also volunteering. Thanks to everyone who was able to come out and participate," said Amy Robinson, Director of Operations.

Holiday Express volunteers provided music and helping hands at Matheny School's prom on May 26. In addition, the 3rd Annual Holiday Express Golf Classic takes place August 8, at Manasquan River Golf Club (www.holidayexpress.org for details). "Last year's Golf Classic was another tremendous success for the second straight year, helping raise funds for the Scholarship and Awards Program," said Joe Petillo, committee chairperson, "This year's event, scheduled for August 8, is poised to be even bigger." Still coming up this year are food drives and the annual St. John's Summer BBQ on July 30.

Holiday Express thanks *you* for supporting our mission to serve those in need















































#### **Giving Partner Program:**

## A Small Neighborhood Makes A Big Difference

One of the hallmarks of Holiday Express is its ever-expanding "Giving Partner Program." This Program matches up Holiday Express donors with specific charitable organizations so that 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" of these items, 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 supports them, and makes the donors and charities true "partners" in the program.

The donors that support the Giving Partner Program include 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 or Volunteer, please email Holiday Express at holexpress@comcast.net or call (732) 544-8010. Thank you. Peggy Fallon and her neighbors in Shrewsbury, New Jersey, are a group of individuals who recently joined the Giving Partner Program as donors. Peggy learned of the Giving Partner Program at the start of last year's holiday season and decided to become involved because, she says, "I wanted to help, and I wanted my kids to have a sense of how fortunate they are." Peggy is afraid that Christmas has become more about "getting" and less about "giving."

Peggy felt that many families in her neighborhood would also be interested in participating in the Giving Partner Program. "My neighborhood is a great community of people; and I was sure that when they learned about the Giving Partner Program, they would want to help too," she said. "The neighborhood is fairly new – most of the families moved in about seven or eight years ago. Then, we lost a neighbor on 9/11; and although everyone is very busy with their own lives, there is a quiet friendship among us. I thought people would be willing to get involved." Peggy contacted about 15 families in her Shrewsbury neighborhood with the idea of forming a Giving Partner donor group and, as she had predicted, her neighbors quickly said "yes."

Peggy's group partnered with Epiphany House, a residential treatment facility for drug and alcohol addicted women and their children. In explaining her choice of which charity to sponsor, Peggy said, "I picked Epiphany House because I thought we could help them on a grass roots scale. Also, it was important that our kids saw that they were helping families. Unfortunately, many of us know family members and/or friends that struggle with addiction. I want my kids to have the awareness that addiction ruins lives."

The wish list Epiphany House provided to Holiday Express included basic items such as sheets, blankets, comforters and towels. Thanks to the generous support of Peggy and her neighbors, Epiphany House now has these items.

Peggy's group is just one example of how individuals can become involved in the Giving Partner Program and help meet the needs of those less fortunate. As Peggy points out, "A neighborhood effort is an ideal way to put resources together to make a difference. Of course big corporate sponsorships are critical to the Holiday Express effort, but if every little neighborhood banded together, regular citizens can make a real difference, too."

Her participation in the Giving Partners Program is Peggy's first experience with Holiday Express and she would like to be a Giving Partner again next year. She would also like to encourage others to become Giving Partners. "See the despair. It is all around you. Step up and make a difference. Holiday Express and the Giving Partner Program are constructive vehicles which are already in place...all you have to want to do is get involved."

## GRATITUDE

If you've ever wondered what might inspire Holiday Express volunteers to continue to give 150% of themselves during the already busy holiday season, please read just a few of the letters

we receive through our email network from clients, caretakers and our own event managers...



Dear Friends,

I wish to express my gratitude to all of you of the Holiday Express experience for the great honor you have bestowed upon me in allowing me to be a part of your greatness, compassion

and love. It is a privilege to have an achievement award named after me. It is without a doubt one of the highlights of my life. With the good news from the Archdiocese that St. John's and St. Patrick's will remain pretty much the same – separate corporations and independent with the charge to help one another in the growth of the ministry to community and commuters – with this good news, I add this kindness from the Holiday Express and I find myself in Heaven!

God Bless, Father Jim Finnerty, St. John's Soup Kitchen



For those of you who came to NJDC Monday night, my thanks for helping me make this a wonderful night. Our reputation preceded us because clients started arriving at 6:10 for a 7 pm show. While the crowd warmed slowly, the aides did their best to make sure that

those in wheelchairs "danced" and those on their feet didn't stop dancing very often. The clients sang along with songs they knew, crowded the band in a loving way, wore their Christmas finest, and partied like there was no tomorrow. Another great memory, thanks to all of you.

Nancy Sabino, Event Manager New Jersey Developmental Center

Dear Amy, Tim, All Volunteers and Band Members and of course our volunteers

It has been quite a week in the Tomaro House! We have tried to write this several times with no luck, we have been so emotional. Although we have been involved with Holiday Express for the past several years, there are absolutely no words to describe how our family felt after leaving Hunterdon Developmental Center. For those of you who don't know, my brother is a resident at Hunterdon. He has been there since he was 9 years old. Alphonse Tomaro is now 41. Holiday Express has been trying to do a show there for the past couple of years with no luck. Thank you Amy for your determination. You made it happen! The recreation director had no idea what Holiday Express was. Well let me tell you, she knows now! In all of the years we have visited there, we have never experienced anything like what we enjoyed last Tuesday. My mother still can't talk about it without getting choked up. Our friends that came are still calling to say what a fabulous experience they had. Yesterday, we

Dear Tim and Gang,

I just have to thank all of you for everything today. I hope that everyone is feeling a little better. Your lead elf was such a trooper. The poor guy was running to the bathroom between dancing on top of the chairs. Such dedication! Poor Mahoney! Another man out for the count. Sorry that the best we could offer was ginger ale and a cot to rest on. You guys are better than Santa. Éveryone always gets what they ask for. The gift that you bring just couldn't fit in his sleigh. What you do for the kids (and the big people too) is nothing short of a "Holiday" miracle. The kids that can't sing - sing that day; the kids that can't dance - dance, if only with their eyes. You bring joy to the hearts of everyone in the auditorium. Everyone gets so excited when they hear that you are coming. Your music plays throughout every classroom in anticipation of your arrival. The kids love to make the posters and have their pictures taken to show their appreciation. Each year more and more of us are wearing Santa hats and holiday attire in honor of your day with us. You are even written into the curriculum of one particular class. The kids in that class make "special" Holiday Expresswear. They incorporate fine motor skills, learning colors, learning to paint, and exposure to holiday music while working. I am the grateful recipient of that Holiday Expresswear - my lab coat is beautifully painted and full of garland, bells and lights. Custom candy cane striped sneakers completed the outfit. And they are looking forward to making next year's addition to my ensemble. I just want to say THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart. Holiday Express is truly the best thing that has ever happened to A Harry Moore School. We realize that many hands were needed to bring us a show. What we enjoy is only the final product of your dedication. Many, many thanks to everyone in the Holiday Express family. Please come again next year - you truly bring the joy and spirit of the holiday season.

With Appreciation and Much Love, Peggy Garvey, A Harry Moore School

Dear Diary

Today we kidnapped Maureen King (morning "boss" of the warehouse) and took her to her first event of the season. I wish you could have seen the look on her face when she walked into Monmouth Votech at 11 am and was met with hugs and kisses. Yup, these guys were dancing BEFORE the music was set up. Now THIS was an EVENT! What a great time! The band was awesome! There was EXACTLY enough food and EXACTLY the right amount of gift bags. Maureen Staub's McDonald's coupons were a hit. The all female cast of Santa and the Grinch were real hot troopers (thanks to Donna). The Comcast guys came through big time. Let us not forget Margaret and Amy who somehow made a bike appear overnight. How do they do that? And, did I see the HUB reporter passing around a pizza? It really doesn't get any better than this! Well, Diary, I have to go plan our next felony kidnapping. I wonder what time the afternoon warehouse "bosses" start? ...oh Joan? oh Marilee??

Kimberly Guadagno, Event Manager Monmouth Votech

went back to Hunterdon for the annual cottage holiday party. The staff members were waiting anxiously to thank us for bringing such holiday spirit to Hunterdon. When we arrived, the Holiday Express CD was blasting from the PA system! All of the family members of the residents were asking what went on last Tuesday. The facility was still buzzing!! As volunteers, we always knew what Holiday Express did was a unique and special experience; but, as family members of one of the thousands you reach out to, we cannot express how grateful we are. You graciously allowed us to live and experience the true meaning of Christmas. We are especially grateful that you allowed our daughters to be a part of something so special. You all took great care in making sure they were included in what goes on during the event. Thanks to all the volunteers that came out of the woodwork at the last minute to lend a hand; from Mike Staub and Andy Lenza and George, who loaded the truck at 8 am, to Jack who made sure we had cake; to Ann who arranged the entire event; to Donna for stepping in for Ann Robinson and for doing what she

does best, being magnificent! To our friends, who sat in bumper-to-bumper traffic and didn't turn back! To the many warehouse volunteers who spent countless hours packing gift bags and boxes (600 in all). To Tim and the incredibly talented musicians and sound crew To Ray and all his volunteers from Commerce Bank; talk about troopers, they put on Elmo and Reindeer costumes with business attire underneath and our Rudolph had high heels! And of course our Elves and characters who totally worked the crowd at both shows! Who could forget our man of the hour, Santa; he was absolutely the second coming to most of these residents!! How do we appropriately thank you all? We can't. Just know that you all made a significant difference in the lives of many people. Many have no family left to visit them. Many have never had an experience like Holiday Express. We were truly honored to have been part of that magical day. It was the best Christmas gift our family has ever received...

May God bless you and your families always, The Tomaro Family Bob, MaryBeth, Julia and Lindsay

# One Man's Vision S C O T T L O N G F I E L D

"A true photograph need not be explained, nor can it be contained in words"

- Ansel Adams



As Holiday Express' photographer, Scott Longfield can be found behind the scenes, capturing the whole spectrum of Holiday Express stories on film. A volunteer from the beginning, Scott has taken thousands of candid photographs chronicling the history and growth of the organization.

"The first year was bare bones; we had the one van with the flat tire you had to

keep filling, and a small soundboard," he recalled. That first season of 10 shows would be memorable for the first recruits. "A woman admitted to Jose Loo and me that she planned to end her life," Scott continued, "and she was so inspired by her Holiday Express experience, she decided to live. It makes my hair stand on end still." That moment sealed his decision to work with Holiday Express.

Volunteering is nothing new to Scott; he's donated his time and talents to many organizations over the years. He is a volunteer for the Red Bank Fire Department and First Aid Squad; and one of the few Monmouth County-based volunteers for the Marine Mammal Stranding Center of Brigantine, NJ. For 10 years, he has been on call 24/7, rescuing seals, dolphins and other marine animals on the Jersey Shore. Both of these goodwill endeavors are ideal for a photographer, placing him at the front lines where he is able to get shots that other photographers dream about.

It also helps with his position as Chief Photographer at the *Two River Times*, where he has worked for 13 years. The newspaper's wall-of-fame is evidence of its reputation for photojournalism. Last year alone, Scott received three awards from the New Jersey Press Association and five from the Society of Professional Journalists. He also received a Senatorial









Proclamation from NJ Senator Joseph M. Kyrillos, Jr., for his talent and dedication.

"I love my job – I love meeting people, the challenges, chasing things, it's something new every day," Scott said, "...diversity and community service." Scott has also been published in Newsweek, Rolling Stone and New Jersey Shore Life. He is a regular contributor to New Jersey Monthly and New Jersey Countryside.

"As a photographer, you do whatever you have to," he said. "I'm very simple. You don't need a whole lot of cameras and lenses as long as you have the talent."

A self-taught photographer, Scott developed his love of the art while traveling the American Northwest, which he refers to as "God's Country". His duck hunting experience as a child has been transformed into his photography. "I still have something in my sight, now I just shoot it with a camera," he said. Taking

slides of the magnificent natural surroundings, he realized that he was on to something special. He continues his nature photography today, and plans to make it available through his new stock photo enterprise, Natural Images, a showcase for his scenics and images of birds and marine life.

Scott is also a judge at the Monmouth County Fair and a member of the Guild of Creative Art. This year he, along with the publisher, initiated the *Two River Times'* First Annual Photography Contest, open to all high school students (contact photos@tworivertimes.net for more details). And if all of this isn't enough, he also plays blues guitar!

One of three boys, Scott lives in Fair Haven with his mother, Dolores, who is 90 years old. His older brother Bruce lives in Basking Ridge, NJ. His twin brother, Glen, and their father, Adrian, passed away in 1989 and 1998, respectively.

Scott learned first-hand the value of caring individuals when he contracted a rare airborne fungus called 'Valley Fever' while living in Arizona in 1978. He was flown to the National Institute of Health (NIH) hospital in Washington, DC, where he participated in a two-month study that saved his life. It not only made him grateful, it motivated him to help others.

Within Holiday Express, Scott's goals are "to make more people aware of the organization and to show people, in a decent way, what we do and those we serve." He continued, "The greatest thing people can say is 'You were there?' – then I know I did my job." With all of his achievements, Scott remains gracious and ready for the next assignment. Knowing he has inspired others is his greatest accomplishment. "The awards are great, but the letters of appreciation mean the most. Hopefully your images will live longer than you do, into the future."

Thank you, Scott!





63 photos in this newsletter (exceptions being Scott's portrait and the Volunteer Spotlight family portraits) are credited to the talent of Scott Longfield

#### Helping Holiday Express Deliver

# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

"For just a few hours, we can give some of these people a little extra attention and love."

## Margaret Gilbertson



Like many volunteers, it is a labor of love that requires flexibility and a cool head. "I must say the first time out doing this was very daunting!" She said, "Just ask Tim about our first year at St. Paul's in Paterson with me coordinating for the first time. Talk about out of the frying pan and jumping into the fire! Thankfully, with help I was able to pull it off and it ended up being a wonderful experience for everyone involved. It has been nine years of learning and trying to get it right

and I am still amazed at what there is to learn as each new season rolls around."

Retired from full-time work outside the home since her second child was born in 1993, Margaret has held several part-time jobs such as waiting tables on the deck at McLoone's for four summers, catered to season ticket holders at the NJ Nets, worked retail and designed and painted home accessories for a business known as Amanda's Attic with fellow volunteer, Joyce Schweers.

Margaret and her husband, Chris have been married for seventeen years and have two children – a son Dillon, 14, and daughter Maggie, 12. Each one of them has gotten involved with Holiday Express in some way. Maggie has also danced for Holiday Express. For Margaret, Holiday Express is truly a family affair. She joked,



"My sisters and brothers are all a part of the organization as well. You may have heard of them – Beth and Tim McLoone – and the rest of the Robinson clan?"

On event coordinating, Margaret said, "You always hope you are doing the best you can for the organization you are visiting. You are with these special individuals for only a few hours and you want to bring them the best Holiday Express has to offer. In the

end though, I believe we do a pretty good job. It is hard to fail when we have such a wonderful warehouse crew to back us up!" she said.

"Without question, the most memorable moment has to be the first year we went to New Lisbon Development Center," she said. "That day left such a huge impression on me. This was the first time I saw such devastating mental disabilities on such a large scale. There was a man in a wheelchair who obviously suffered from Cerebral

disabilities on such a large scale.
There was a man in a wheelchair who obviously suffered from Cerebral
Palsy among other disabilities, and really seemed to light up when the music started. I bent down to say hi and he got hold of my hand, he then pulled me down even further so I could hold him. I really started to lose it because I came to realize this was all he

wanted...he just wanted someone to hold him." Indelible

experiences such as these are what drive volunteers.

Margaret continued, "These institutions house so many individuals who, one day, are just dropped off by family that can no longer handle their loved one's situation. For just a few hours we can give some of these people a little extra attention and love. That has been one of the great gifts I have received from this experience. I have enjoyed meeting so many special individuals."

Thank you, Margaret, for your many years of caring!

# A husband, father, teacher – this seasoned musician tells us about his experience with Holiday Express.

### Lee Sanderson



Currently, Lee works as a Teacher of Music at the South River Middle School, South River, NJ, teaching grades 5 to 8 in chorus, beginning and intermediate band, and 7th grade music appreciation.

"Teaching is my third career," Lee said, "I was a full-time musician

for many years, working as a sideman with performers such as Chubby Checker, Bill Haley's Comets, Bobby Rydell, Cab Calloway, Johnny Brown, Barbara McNair, plus thirty days of "one nighters" on a bus with Tiny Tim, Pinky Lee and Zippy the Chimp in a traveling vaudeville tour." He also played 120 shows with Rodney Dangerfield at the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas during one hot summer. He was a sideman for Rodney's opening act, a vocalist from New Jersey. Lee's also done plenty of

local gigs with a variety of musicians from the Jersey Shore.

"My second career was Vice President of a Retail Services company which I started with two other musician friends in 1983," he told us. "We grew the business from just the three of us servicing twenty-four Bradlees stores, to 200 employees in thirty-eight states by 1996, when I resigned."

"I became involved with Holiday Express after I read the stories in the *Two River Times* about the first tour," Lee said, "I decided to volunteer the next season. At first it was, I thought, a way to meet local musicians since I had recently moved to Red Bank from North Jersey and had not found a connection to the local players.

musicians, but I had also found something much greater than I ever expected."

In thinking back on his most memorable moments, Lee said, "It's

In thinking back on his most memorable moments, Lee said, "It's difficult to choose a particular moment since there have been so many. If I had to choose one, it would be the first St. John's show

when we played on the snow-covered sidewalk and the horn players had to keep running to the bus to keep our horns warm enough to play. The entire Holiday Express experience from my very first show to the last one of each season, and, I might add, being able to perform with so many talented and gifted musicians is life-affecting itself."

Lee and his wife, Mary-Ellen, have two boys – Ian, 14, and Gabriel, 11. Ian began learning bass guitar this

year and Gabriel (who attended his first Holiday Express show at the age of 8 months) plays piano and guitar. Who knows, maybe one day they will follow their dad's lead and join the band too.

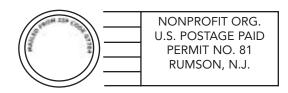
What's most challenging for Lee (and many volunteers) is finding the time to do as many events as he can. "If I could, I would do them all, which I have done in the past." He remembers his life before joining Holiday Express, "It was extremely intense during the Christmas season; because of this I had lost the Christmas spirit for many years. Since joining Holiday Express I have found the Christmas spirit again."

Thank you, Lee, for sharing all your talents!





968 Shrewsbury Ave. Tinton Falls, NJ 07724 www.holidayexpress.org



On August 8th, 2005 Holiday Express again returns to the beautiful Manasquan River Golf Club in Brielle, New Jersey, for the 3rd Holiday Express Golf Classic.

For those who have joined us in the past, you already know what a great day of fun and golf this is. For those of you yet to experience this event, it is unlike any golf outing you have ever played in.

From the moment you arrive you will be surrounded with activities, food, entertainment, prizes, and don't even be surprised if the Grinch helps you with your bag.



This year the event will feature two separate tournaments. The morning format will be a Scramble for those who hope to take full advantage of Manasquan River's famous terrain. The afternoon will host a Team Best Ball format for those golfers who wish to challenge MRGC head on.

GOLF CLASSIC

Special performance by the inspirational Dennis Walters. This rare opportunity to see Dennis live is not to be missed.

Manasquan River Golf Club regist Brielle, New Jersey our web

Sponsorships and Player registration info is available on our website, or call 732-544-8010.

WWW.HOLIDAYEXPRESS.ORG

