

Stars for Charity

Once Again Shooting Across the Sky



Painted by Anne LaBonté-Neff of Bay Head, founder of Stars for Charity.

With its strong foundation originating at the Jersey Shore, proceeds from Stars for Charity over the past four years have provided almost 170,000 meals for those in need, and this year's event looks to exceed past successes.

Local artist and gallery owner Anne LaBonté-Neff founded Stars for Charity in 2002 as a way to lure browsers into her Bay Head gallery, the Anchor & Palette. "I was trying to figure out some way to get people into the unheated gallery when I opened it on the weekends during the holiday season," she said. The gallery (then located on Mount Street and now inside The Jolly Tar in Bay Head as well as online) displays and sells prints, gifts, and other items and features the works of her late father,

acclaimed artist Dick LaBonté, who is known for his nostalgic scenes of the Jersey Shore.



courtesy of Manasquan River Group of Artists

Stars for Charity entailed wooden stars ranging in size from four to seven inches designed and painted by local artists in their preferred mediums, including oil, acrylic, and watercolor. Among the artists participating in the beginning were Pauline Mickle, Linda Hejduk, Janice Collinson, Dick LaBonté, Al Barker, William Bunting, and more.

The stars were then put up for bid, and the proceeds were donated to a charity selected by the artist after the auction ended.

During the holiday season, LaBonté-Neff displayed the stars in her gallery, and they soon became popular as unique holiday gifts. Bidding would take place in person or by phone.

Stars for Charity ran from 2002 through 2010, and in that time, thousands of dollars were donated to numerous local charities, including Popcorn Park Zoo, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Jersey Shore Animal Shelter, Feed the Children, Oceans of Love, and Bay Head Fire Company No. 1 among others.

Then there was a ten year hiatus.

In the summer of 2021, artist William Bunting relaunched Stars for Charity with LaBonté-Neff's blessings. Bunting paints classic and antique cars, trains, motorcycles, and other vehicles in the photo realistic style. As the new administrator of the relaunched charity, he solicited help from many of his Jersey Shore artist friends, and thanks to the internet, the charity

**On auction this year.
By Linda Hejduk.**



Artist William Bunting's painting of the original Anchor & Palette Gallery on Mount Street in Bay Head where Stars for Charity was founded. Bunting is the current administrator of the charity.

soon went worldwide. "All of my art friends were excited to participate," Bunting said, "but I had no experience running a charity or a gallery."

With only his ambition and a vision, Bunting embarked on a journey to revive the charity with one change—all proceeds would be pooled together and donated to fight hunger. He knew he would need help, so he presented the idea to his church, New Dover United Methodist in Edison, and the congregation was soon assisting with his mission.

New Dover United Methodist Church in December.

"All proceeds go to Feeding America and the Bread Breakers ministry, which was started during the pandemic to feed the needy in the area," Bunting explained. "Each dollar raised will provide multiple meals for those in need and corporate donation matches are welcome."

In 2021, its first year, the revived charity raised \$4,300., which provided almost 26,000 meals. The following year, profits more than doubled to \$10,500. and 65,000 meals. Last year yielded 78,000 meals and enough stars to fill a four-panel display at the church.

Bunting believes 2024's success will go beyond his expectations. "I see a great future for this event, which offers more than just a joyful fundraiser," he said. "Stars for Charity



On auction this year. By Laura Hart.

connects artists who otherwise would never meet and offers an opportunity to unite galleries and religious institutions while spreading awareness about art and our hunger ministry to the public."

Bunting hopes the charity's Jersey Shore roots will continue to provide much needed support for those facing hunger. "Stars for Charity is in its infancy," he said, "and it's up to us to keep it growing."

—Jill Ocone



courtesy of Manasquan River Group of Artists

On auction this year. By Valerie Morone.

Now in its fourth year since its rebirth, Stars for Charity's auction goes live on eBay on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving) and runs for twelve days. Bids start at \$25., and each star's listing contains information about its artist. Any unsold stars will be auctioned off at a live event at



On auction this year. By Margaret Patterson.

courtesy of Manasquan River Group of Artists

The 2024 Stars for Charity will be on display from November 20 through November 29 at New Dover United Methodist Church, 687 New Dover Road, Edison.

Bidding goes live on November 29 (Black Friday) on eBay, and the auction runs for twelve days. The link is: www.ebay.com/usr/new_dover_umc.

Any remaining stars will be sold during a live auction at New Dover United Methodist Church in December.

It is William Bunting's hope that other non-profit organizations, churches, mosques, and synagogues across the country will establish their own Stars for Charity fundraisers to benefit Feeding America and Breaking Bread. Those interested in designing a star or hosting their own Stars for Charity fundraiser can email Bunting at: buntingart@yahoo.com.