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NEW JERSEY CELEBRITIES COME OUT FOR HUNGER

With the need greater than ever, the Community FoodBank of New Jersey's virtual Blue Jean Ball raises over \$1.2 million

Honoring Stop & Shop, First Lady of New Jersey Tammy Snyder Murphy, the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, and CFBNJ's partners in disaster and pandemic relief

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The Community FoodBank of New Jersey (CFBNJ) held its annual Blue Jean Ball virtually on Thursday, May 13 at 6:00 pm to raise money for hunger-relief efforts. After a year on hiatus as the organization responded to the height of the pandemic, the beloved event returned, continuing a decades-long tradition of providing a fun, social evening while honoring some of CFBNJ's most committed supporters.

Even as vaccines are given out and the state slowly reopens, the fight against the pandemic's impact is far from over. Accessing nutritious food is still an urgent challenge for families who are struggling to recover financially, who have been forced to use up their savings, or who may not have gotten back to their livelihoods yet. Hunger remains at a peak high, with 1.2 million New Jerseyans – a 56% increase over pre-pandemic numbers – now experiencing food insecurity due to COVID-19.

This year's Blue Jean Ball, the first-ever to be held online, drew nearly 400 attendees and raised more than \$1.2 million to help provide for those neighbors in need. The event was chaired by Alma DeMetropolis, Polly and Terry O'Toole, Patty and Chris Perry and Roby and Josh Weinreich.

The highlight of the evening featured pre-recorded performances by New Jersey native Jon Bon Jovi and The Goo Goo Dolls, who generously lent their star power to the cause.

"When I was a kid, we were kind of poor; we didn't have a lot to eat sometimes," said New Jersey resident Johnny Rzeznik of The Goo Goo Dolls. "Kids need to be nourished in order to learn, and we need to be part of correcting this problem."

The program also included an awards ceremony, honoring CFBNJ partners who have exemplified the organization's core values of FOOD, HELP, and HOPE.

The FOOD award was presented to Stop & Shop, a long-time CFBNJ corporate partner. With a focus on feeding children and college students, Stop & Shop frequently provides food and funds, while inspiring their employees and shoppers to help their hungry neighbors. They donate turkeys every Thanksgiving, assist during emergencies, and host annual register round-up campaigns.

"I'm so honored to accept the FOOD award on behalf of Stop & Shop, our 7,000 New Jersey associates, and our 60 New Jersey stores," said Gordon Reid, President of Stop & Shop. "Stop & Shop has been serving local communities for more than 100 years, not just by providing a place to shop but also by taking an active role in the neighborhoods where we do

business. This means taking a stance, lending a hand, and supporting those in need. This means doing everything we can to support the work and mission of Community FoodBank of New Jersey.”

The HELP award was given to First Lady of New Jersey Tammy Snyder Murphy and the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund (NJPRF). In founding NJPRF, the First Lady demonstrated her genuine care for the most vulnerable people in the state. With her leadership, NJPRF helped hundreds of thousands of marginalized people in the state gain access to food, health care, child care, housing, education, and direct cash assistance.

“The HELP award is indicative of the true partnership that we at NJPRF have shared with our on-the-ground providers, particularly the Community FoodBank of New Jersey,” said the First Lady. “I’m humbled, honored, and so proud of what we have accomplished and grateful to everyone that pulled together to make it happen.”

The HOPE award was presented by Senator Cory Booker, a champion in the fight against hunger, to a number of CFBNJ’s partners in disaster and pandemic relief: the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, the Civil Air Patrol, the County of Union, New Jersey, the Franciscan Community Development Center of Fairview, Ironbound Community Corporation, Table of Hope, and Team Rubicon.

“At this year’s Blue Jean Ball, we honor some of the standouts who sowed hope in our time of sorrow so that we all could live to see a brighter tomorrow,” said Senator Booker. “The selfless efforts that these honorees embody is the spirit of hope. I am so proud of what we have accomplished in these most trying of times. All of us working together toward one common goal of helping one another — this is who we are. This is New Jersey.”

The evening concluded with time for the attendees to network in their respective breakout groups.

“This year’s Blue Jean Ball was unique – because of its virtual format and considering all that we’ve been through and accomplished over the past year,” said CFBNJ President & CEO Carlos Rodriguez. “With a historic amount of state funding and the support of our donors, volunteers, and community partners, we’ve provided more food than ever before to more neighbors in need than ever before. And, thanks to the Blue Jean Ball’s chairs, sponsors, and attendees, we’ve exceeded the event’s fundraising goals to help struggling New Jerseyans lead healthy, active, and productive lives.”

CFBNJ would like to extend a special thanks to the sponsors that made this year’s Blue Jean Ball possible: Bank of America, Wayne Paglieri, Stop & Shop, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Luig Family Foundation, Polly and Terry O’Toole, Roby and Josh Weinreich, and Josh Weston.

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[The Community FoodBank of New Jersey \(CFBNJ\)](#), a member of Feeding America®, has been delivering food, help and hope across the state for more than 45 years. Last year, CFBNJ provided nutritious food for over 66 million meals through its network of more than 1,000 community partners including pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, mobile pantries, and child and senior feeding programs throughout the 15 New Jersey counties it serves. For our hungry neighbors, the Community FoodBank of New Jersey is the powerful agent of change that fills the emptiness caused by hunger and provides resources that are essential to earning a sustainable living.