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HE'S LIVIN' LARGE

Joe Henry loves life, helps others

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Back in 1994, when WWZY (107.1 FM) was feeling its way with Big Joe Henry, the new program director, the station decided it was imperative that local radio be "really involved with the community." And local radio, they decided, excels at charity.

"You don't see it with cable or TV," says Henry. "Radio is live and local."

He's the weekend DJ on WKXW-FM (NJ 101.5) and WIXM-FM (97.3 in South Jersey), which he joined in 1997, where he hosts the "Big Joe Jersey Request Show" from 7 p.m. till midnight on Fridays and "Big Joe Henry Show" from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The rest of the week he does voiceovers and works on personal appearances. He gets more than 100 requests a year from various causes, and accepts an average of 40 to 45 a year.

"Gut wrenching" is the way he describes the task of turning down the others, usually due to lack of time. And the current economy has made it tougher. "Lots of charities aren't making their needs," he says. "Times are hard. You can't go to the well every day. I push as much as I can, but . . ."

Since coming to NJ101.5, Big Joe Henry's appearances have raised more than \$25 million for charities — from Jason's Dreams for Kids to cold cash for the families of National Guard troops shipping out to the Middle East.

"That includes small ones to big ones," says the big man, whose slogan is "Living Large and Lovin' Life," an understatement if there ever was one. Suffice to say the former college football player runs no risk of getting lost in a crowd. But a stranger would soon find that the Long Branch resident has a personality and affectionate nature of equal proportions. He's quick to laugh at himself and appreciate life's ironies. It's apparent that the charity thing is still a continuous party to Big Joe, who has gathered a vast network of fans among the bands and musicians, volunteers and organizations he's befriended over the years.

His next big event is "Putting for P.A.L.S.," or People with ALS, better known as the life-robbing Lou Gehrig's disease. The Rock & Roll Music Fund is sponsoring the Miniature Golf Outing on Monday, July 28, at Twin Brook Golf Center, in Tinton Falls. This event holds special meaning for Henry, because his friends Joan Dancy, who succumbed to ALS, and her fiance, the late Terry Magovern, Bruce Springsteen's friend and assistant, started the organization. PALS' role is to fill the gap for medical needs not covered by insurance, as well as to provide financial assistance to enhance the lives of people living with ALS.

"People may not realize it," says Henry, "but when you're getting on in the disease and are wheelchair bound, you need to reconfigure your entire home — doorways, cabinets. This is where PALS picks up — and provides family counseling as well." One hundred percent of the money raised goes to PALS, with donors handling the refreshments and equipment, and the station absorbing the staff costs of staging a remote show. Big Joe donates his time for the events. PALS, as a grass-roots organization without any offices or paid staff, operates on a shoestring so that more proceeds go to

patients and their families.

The Monday golf outing includes a full day of food and activity for \$75 a golfer, or \$300 for a foursome. For information, call (732) 747-8216. Those who can't make it can send a donation in memory of Joan Dancy to P.A.L.S., Riverview Medical Center, 1 Riverview Plaza, Red Bank, N.J. 07701, or call (732) 450-2677.

If you can't make that one, the annual Holiday Express Clambake is coming up on Sept. 14, at MerriMakers in Sea Bright.

Henry has been burned by charities only about a handful of times over the years. Consequently, he now interviews volunteers who work for the prospective charities, as well as the people they profess to help. This way, he says, he doesn't have to dismiss out of hand the smaller, lesser-known groups who need help.

Not surprisingly, Henry relaxes by cooking, tinkering with such barbecue delicacies as jalapeno-infused honey and herb rubs for ribs. His trade secret, he confides to us, is Butch's Smack Your Lips BBQ of Mount Laurel. He's even working on Big Joe's Big Jersey Cook Book.

"We're going to have recipes from listeners, 101.5 personalities, friends and celebrities — everything from appetizers to holiday dishes. It'll be packed with good stuff. I'm including 35 signature dishes from me alone." And nothing will be held back. The big man even promises to divulge the spices he adds to Butch's sauce that make it his own.

And in typical Big Joe Henry style, a portion of the proceeds for the book, which is due out in mid-November, will go to the Foodbank of Monmouth and Ocean counties.

Maureen Nevin Duffy hosted "Asbury Radio — The Radio Voice of Asbury Park," a public affairs talk show at the city's WYGG 88.1FM station.
