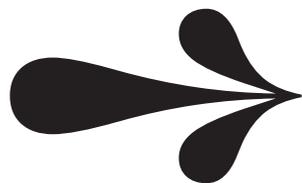


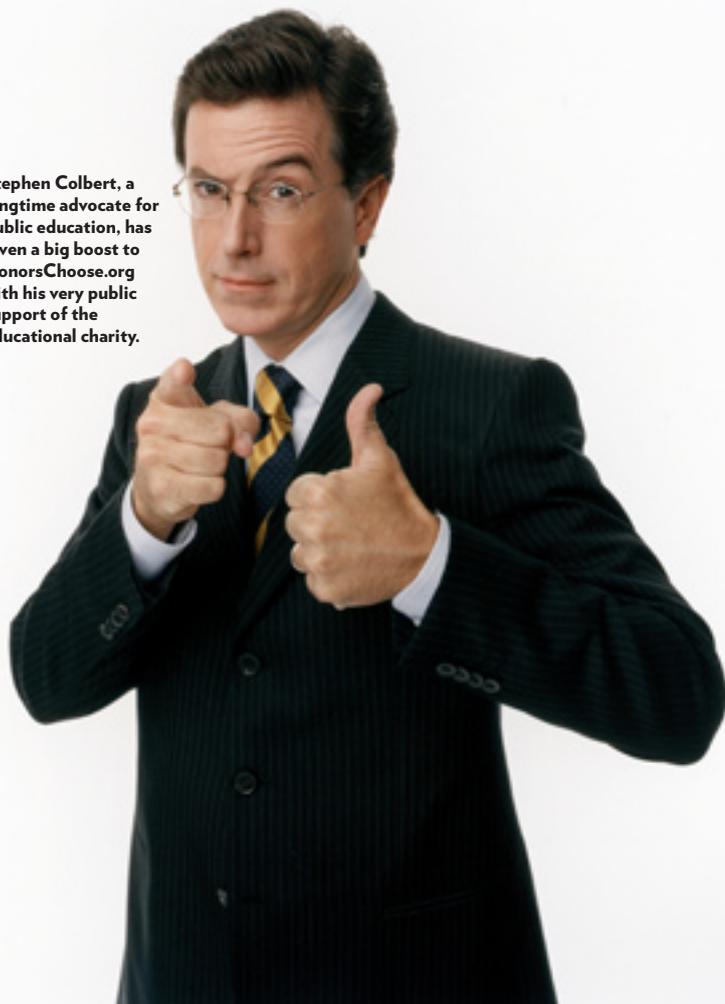
PEACE, LOVE,
AND
Charity



More than 40 PERCENT OF NEW JERSEY residents donate to charity, *making us the second most active givers* in the nation. What better way, then, to wrap up the year than with a salute to some Garden State luminaries who've used the **LIMELIGHT FOR THE GREATER GOOD.**

By LESLIE GARISTO PFAFF

Stephen Colbert, a longtime advocate for public education, has given a big boost to DonorsChoose.org with his very public support of the educational charity.



Angel Rock Project founder Malaak Compton Rock urges supporters to give what they can afford — even if it's just a few dollars. "Understand," she says, "that \$5 from one person is just the same as \$5,000 from another and can literally change a life in another part of the world."



GOOD HUMOR GUY: **STEPHEN COLBERT**

His late-night news show may be fake, but Montclair resident Stephen Colbert's commitment to charity is genuine. And one of his favorite nonprofits, DonorsChoose.org, has recently been reaping the benefits of his generosity and celebrity. The website allows school teachers from across the country to post their needs — everything from dictionaries to microscopes — and offers visitors the opportunity to donate to the projects of their choice. Colbert, who broadcast this year from Iraq, has folded in his support for U.S. troops overseas with his enthusiasm for public education by launching "Support Our Troops," an initiative on the site that urges donors to benefit classrooms whose kids have parents in the military.

"Stephen's support and his mentioning us on his show have given us exposure we could never have gotten otherwise," says Yaritza Olmeda-Cedeño, an associate director at DonorsChoose.org. Colbert, who recently joined the organization's board of directors, offers his

estimation of the charity in his typical mock-solemn fashion: "As I endeavor to protect our nation from bears, DonorsChoose.org is protecting public school kids from classrooms that lack books, art supplies, technology, and field trips." We feel safer — and smarter — already.

GLOBAL THINKER: **MALAAK COMPTON ROCK**

"I'm blessed to come from a family that really believes in my motto: 'Service is the rent we pay for living.'" That's how Malaak Compton Rock, public relations whiz and wife of actor/comedian Chris Rock, explains her vocation as a philanthropist.

For more than a decade, Rock has given considerably more than financial support and a public face to her own causes and a slew of others, including Hurricane Katrina relief and child abuse prevention. Last year, after serving as a judge on the charity/reality show *Oprah's Big Give*, she founded the Angel Rock Project (angelrockproject.com),

FOR THE

Boys

James Gandolfini says The Wounded Warrior Project's co-founder Al Giordano "wanted to be involved in sending a positive message about Iraq War veterans."



*"I'm more proud
of my work with the New York Restoration Project than any movie."*

—Bette Midler

a website devoted to promoting the nonprofits she champions and offering guidance to others on where and how to give back.

But if this resident of Alpine could give her heart to only one project it would have to be Journey for Change, an organization she founded in 2008 offering inner-city kids from Brooklyn the chance to experience a year of service in the shantytowns of South Africa. "These are kids who've never traveled before, have never served, have always been on the receiving end of aid and not on the giving end of service," she says. The experience, she explains, has taught them to think globally rather than locally. We can't think of a better teacher for that particular lesson than Rock herself.

A VOICE FOR VETERANS: **JAMES GANDOLFINI**

As conflicted capo Tony Soprano, Westwood native James Gandolfini will forever be associated with the Garden State. He has an indelible physical presence and a talent for larger-than-life roles — and, as it happens, a heart to match. Notoriously publicity-shy, Gandolfini nevertheless offers a glimpse of that heart when

he speaks with wounded veterans, whether in the acclaimed 2007 HBO documentary *Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq* or at the bedside of a wounded vet in a VA hospital in Texas. "You can tell when Jimmy's around them that he cares, he gets it," says Al Giordano, deputy executive director and co-founder of The Wounded Warrior Project. The nonprofit, founded in 2003, is dedicated to helping severely wounded soldiers home from Iraq and Afghanistan and ensuring that today's veterans are "the best adjusted, most successful generation of veterans ever," explains Giordano.

Since Gandolfini first learned of the project during the filming of *Alive Day Memories*, he's been a staunch supporter. "It's an amazing organization that deserves everyone's support," he says. And last year, he raised nearly \$200,000 for the nonprofit when Christie's auctioned off 24 of Tony Soprano's most notorious outfits (including that famous bathrobe). The result was as gratifying to Gandolfini as it was to Wounded Warrior. "It was my honor to meet these kids," he says of the veterans he's come to know through the organization. "The government isn't doing nearly enough for them, and I'm happy to be able to help them whenever I can."



"Sometimes," says New York Restoration Project founder Bette Midler, "the only peace and beauty available to a totally concrete neighborhood is the park or garden."



WORD

Power

"When you hear people talk about **not being able to read**, and being so embarrassed at not being able to help children with homework and pretending they can read a street sign, you realize the trap that they're in."

GREEN GAL: **BETTE MIDLER**

Bette Midler's never been one to sequester herself in a tower, ivory or otherwise. So when she moved to New York in 1995, the star — whose parents were from Paterson and who worked as a go-go dancer in Union City in the 1960s — traveled to the Big Apple's "forgotten" neighborhoods and was appalled at what she found. She saw parks and open spaces strewn with garbage and suffering from years of neglect, and her first impulse was to simply pick up the trash herself. In effect, that's what she did, by founding the New York Restoration Project, a nonprofit with a mission "to clean and green," says Executive Director Drew Becher. He describes the NYRP as a kind of "Robin Hood, taking from below 96th Street and giving it everywhere else." And give it has: Over the past decade and a half, it's been responsible for hauling off 875 tons of trash, raising a green oasis on the site of an illegal dumping ground on the Harlem River, saving scores of community gardens, educating inner-city kids about the environment — the list, as divine as Miss M herself, goes on and on.

Recently, the NYRP partnered with New York's Parks Department in an initiative to plant a million trees. "So far," Midler says with considerable pride, "we've planted over 225,000." It seems fitting that the performer whose first starring role was as "The Rose" now joyfully flaunts her green thumb. "I'm more proud of my work with the NYRP," she says, "than any movie."

WORDSMITH: **MARY HIGGINS CLARK**

She's written 28 novels (selling 80 million copies of them in the United States alone), holds 18 honorary doctorates, and counts among her many honors the National Arts Club's first Gold Medal in Education. So it should surprise no one that Mary Higgins Clark is an ardent and active booster of literacy. As a longtime supporter and spokesperson for Literacy Partners, the Saddle River resident dubbed "the Queen of Suspense" has chaired the organization's Writers for Readers committee, signed countless fundraising letters, and read at its galas. In addition, her books have been condensed to serve as an introduction to the joys — and in her particular case, thrills — of reading. "She's been very loyal, very committed, and always keeps us in mind as she goes about her life," says Parker Ladd, co-founder of the organization responsible for teaching thousands of adult New Yorkers to read and write.

Clark understands adversity, having been raised by a single mother in the Bronx and, as a young widow, raising five children on her own. "They are not backward or stupid people," she says of the nonprofit's graduates. "They just need a chance, and reading gives them a sense of dignity." These are apt words from a woman whose life is a testament to obstacles overcome through the love of a good book.