

## Italian Americans Join Operation Shoebox to Support Troops

FRANKLIN, NJ - Operation Shoebox New Jersey's Bocce Invitational Tournament, to be held on Sunday June 3 at 9 am at Colonial Park, is quickly becoming one of the most exciting events to be held in the state this summer.

So far, as many as 500 players expect to compete in the round robin tournament on 12 regulation bocce courts that are being built by the Somerset County Park Commission. All proceeds from the event will benefit OPSHBX NJ, a non-profit corporation dedicated to sending care packages to US troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since its founding in 2005, the organization has raised \$100,000 and shipped 10,000 boxes overseas.

Celebrity lookalikes Joe Manuella (Robert DeNiro) and Vince Caravello (Joe Pesci) are reaching out to their extensive network of impersonators, entertainers and comics to help them host the tournament.

"I know what it feels like to be a 20-year-old soldier in a hostile situation," said Manuella, an Army veteran of the Vietnam War who also served 23 years in the Air Force Reserve and was called to active duty with his medical unit during Desert Storm in 1991.

Manuella, who has been impersonating DeNiro for over 30 years, often makes appearances with Caravello where they take on their respective personas and portray

the actors as characters in films the duo appeared in together. They comedians have put out the word to their fellow impersonators - including Frank Sinatra - to join with them at the event.

Caravello, who has helped OPSHBX NJ with other events including golf tournaments and packings, became involved with the organization through his friendship with Frank Valanzola, chairman of the bocce event.

"I wanted to do something for my country even though I was never in the service I want to contribute something to it," he said.

In conjunction with the tournament, OPSHBX NJ will host a large-scale packing event adjacent to the bocce courts beneath a large circus tent. All players and spectators are invited to participate. Everyone will be asked to write a letter or greeting card to a soldier or Marine which will be enclosed in each package.

Compassion and patriotism is what attracts supporters to OPSHBX NJ, which is evidenced by the response of the Italian American community to the bocce event, according to Valanzola.

"Each soldier, each Marine who receives a care package from this event will know that all Italian Americans came together that day to not only raise money, but to show their support for our brave and dedicated military men and women overseas," Valanzola said.

Patriotic Italian Americans



**HAPPY TO RECIEVE OPERATON SHOEBOX PACKAGES** are members of the TF 50th Personnel Services Battalion Bagram Airfield, currently stationed in Afghanistan.

and Italian American organizations throughout New Jersey continue to commit resources and financial support to help ensure the success of the bocce tournament and packing event.

Vincent and Anthony D'Aniello, owners of Manville Pizza and Restaurant, are donating food and dinner, saving

OPSHBX NJ thousands of dollars; Jeff Neary, owner of The Wine Room in Bound Brook, is donating a barrel of wine for the event.

Bill Schievella, a sergeant for the state Parole Bureau in Passaic County, is president of the Italian American Police Society of New Jersey, which has 5,500 members in all 21 New Jersey counties. Members include local police, state police and federal agents who work or live in the state, as well as those who work for other law enforcement agencies.

"We're excited about the Bocce Invitational on two levels; first, it's a patriotic endeavor, and it's important for us to reach out to our troops," Schievella said. "It's also a chance to bring together a large group of Italian Americans to play an Italian American sport."

Vinny Nardone, a police sergeant in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office is coordinating the organization's involvement with the Bocce Invitational. He said several motorcycle police from several different departments will ride in on their bikes.

"We're going to make a donation, sponsor some teams, help pack some boxes, do anything we can to support Operation Shoebox New Jersey," Nardone said.

Sponsors include The Italian Tribune and Roma Bank. Also planning to participate are several local chapters of UNICO, The Italian American Association, and Sons of Italy.

Other sponsors include The Somerset Patriots baseball team and Flemington Car & Truck Country.

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# Jackals Baseball

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