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## Aligning the stars to fight for a cause

By Adina Genn

Friday, March 17, 2006

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In his song, "Another Day in Paradise," Phil Collins brought universal attention to the plight of the homeless. Now Collins is doing his part to stamp out hunger right here on Long Island.

Collins is one of 172 artists who agreed to create a sketch that may be replicated on 6-by-6-inch ceramic tiles through Massapequa-based Duffy, Barrett & Taggart. Started in December 2004 by Francis Duffy, the company donates 15 percent of all sales to Long Island Cares. The organization was created in 1980 by singer-songwriter Harry Chapin, who was killed in a car accident in Jericho in 1981.

Collins is helping Duffy, and Long Island Cares, gain international attention. In January, he featured his ceramic tile on his Web site, which includes a link to Long Island Cares.

Within a week of Collins' posting, "I received over 60 e-mails from all over the world," said Duffy, age 50. "Many of these led on to paid shipments."

In February, monthly sales hit more than \$300, a shot in the arm for the company,

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whose total sales in 2005 were about \$1,200.

The boost from Collins outperformed any of Duffy's promotional efforts, including newspaper advertising in the summer of 2005 and exhibiting at craft shows during Thanksgiving weekend.

Other participating celebrities include Phyllis Diller, Eli Wallach and singer Dion. Such contributions, Duffy hopes, will help him gain mileage with additional artists.

Another supporter, Long Island native Nelson Demille, was Duffy's very first customer. The best-selling mystery author purchased 20 of his own ceramics and has a Celebrity Ceramic link on his Web site.

Duffy scours the news for celebrities who, through philanthropy, "are trying to get something done," he said. "Bono is at the top of my list."

Duffy has collected the sketches for 15 years; the first one was from Ed Lowe in 1991.

Being "connected to a charity" helps his appeal for artwork stand out. "It stays out of their junk mail," he said.

Before producing a tile, Duffy obtains a signed release from the artist. Legal fees and other startup costs came close to \$5,000. Through online research, Duffy found a Maryland-based company to produce the tiles. Each one is packaged with a 5-inch tabletop display easel.

Collecting and selling the sketches of well-known personalities is "fun and different exposure for these many celebrities, and at the same time, this is worthwhile and productive exposure for Long Island Cares," Duffy said.

A graduate of New York's School of Visual Art, Duffy also serves as an art director on Long Island.

His efforts are very much in the spirit of Chapin, who donated about 50 percent of his proceeds to charity, said Robin Amato, director of development at Long Island Cares. "On the day he was killed, [Chapin] was on his way to a charity concert," Amato said.

The project is the organization's only "cause-related marketing" program, according to Amato. But Duffy doesn't plan to stop at tiles. He is talking with literary agents to publish a book of the sketches, and hopes to donate more than 15 percent of those proceeds to Long Island Cares as well.

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