

## Neil Barber is a Hero to Many Families



Families, teams and communities are very much alike. They all involve people banding together with common goals of support and success. This hero story is about a member of a family and a team and a community and how they all come together.

Neil Barber was "thrown a curve ball," as his father says. At the age of 16 and a rising lacrosse star, he became mentally challenged and was eventually diagnosed and hospitalized for Schizophrenia. Barber's family was there for him, as were his friends and team mates. One of the first to hear of his condition was his coach, Bob Rule who made a pledge that the lacrosse community would not forget him. That touching statement turned into a tribute that involved collecting cans of food in the classroom to be donated to help feed hungry families on Long Island. It also gave Neil's father, Greg, a chance to speak to students about mental illness.

As the collection box grew, so did their plans to expand and Neil's Wheels was born. Volunteers now collect donations at home and business parties, especially around the holidays, to keep food pantries stocked. It is estimated they have donated more than 40,000 cans of food since 2009. The majority of the donations go to feed local families with help from the Presbyterian Church in Northport, Temple Bethel and the Huntington Initiative, and LI Cares. The Presbyterian Church alone feeds more 200 families per week, which makes Neil, his family, teammates and community very proud of what Neil's Wheels is able to do.

But, why stop there? Advocates from Neil's home town of Manhasset started a petition to get Lacrosse back into the 2024 Olympics. The most famous supporter of the petition is Jim Brown, who graduated from Manhasset, and is not only considered to be one of the greatest football players to have played in the NFL, but also one of the greatest Lacrosse players.

What is even more inspiring is that Neil's Wheels was chosen by the organizing group for the Lacrosse inclusion into the 2024 Olympics, to represent the Manhasset Community, for the good works Neil has brought about that help feed those in the community and for giving people a forum for discussing mental health issues.

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