

## **Manhasset students, Islanders aid homeless**

**April 1, 2011 by BART JONES / bart.jones@newsday.com**

Some 150 Manhasset Middle School students are teaming up with the Islanders to help collect food for Long Island's homeless and bring attention to the issue of mental illness.

At this Saturday night's game with the Carolina Hurricanes, fans are being urged to bring a can of food to donate along with those the students have been gathering. After the game, the students will get to skate on the ice with former Islander star Bobby Nystrom for an hour.

The effort grew out of a group called Neil's Wheels NY founded by the father of a former Manhasset star athlete who later suffered mental problems and became homeless.

The father, Greg Barber, said that besides gathering food for the homeless, he hopes the event will also focus a spotlight on the once taboo topic of mental illness.

"I want kids to be able to talk about mental illness comfortably in their schools," Barber said.

His son, Neil, was a standout athlete at Manhasset High School and Canterbury prep school in Connecticut two decades ago, but his performance on the lacrosse field and basketball court mysteriously began to falter. No one knew until several years later that he was starting to suffer from schizophrenia.

His college career was quickly cut short because of his mental illness, and eventually he ended up homeless, moving up and down the East Coast and often ending up in homeless shelters, Greg Barber said. "He tried to run away from his disease, and was treated well at homeless shelters," his father said.

Today, he is an inpatient at Pilgrim Psychiatric Center in Brentwood.

Two years ago he met up with his former lacrosse coach, Bob Rule, who spoke about Neil's story to his students at Manhasset Middle School. The students decided they wanted to give food to Neil, who decided to channel the large amount of donated goods to homeless shelters in the Huntington Station area.

The food movement has been expanding since then, and is hitting a new peak with the Islanders event, Greg Barber said.