CMEE's Covid Response

By Jessica Mackin-Cipro

Photos Courtesy CMEE

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Children's Museum of the East End has transformed into a food pantry on Thursdays, serving some of the community members most in need.

It was because of this need that the Food 2 Play food pantry at CMEE was formed. The initiative aims to ensure that the most vulnerable in our community are provided with enough to eat.

"Kids can't play if they're hungry," said Steve Long, CMEE's president.

While CMEE, like so many other non-profits, lost expected revenue in 2020 — to the tune of $750,000 — the team remained on a mission to serve East End families and children.

Through partnerships with other local non-profits, members of the East End business community, and financial contributions from donors, CMEE has been able to provide food for over 70 families on a weekly basis — offering boxes of pantry items as well as fresh produce.

According to CMEE, "94 percent of the families participating in this food pantry are Spanish-speaking and have previously partici-

pated in the museum's outreach programs for underserved children, including its family literacy classes and Head Start preschool."

And now, a year into the pandemic, the museum has provided food to over 200 different families and over 1000 people within the community.

Many of the fundraising efforts at CMEE have gone to support the Covid-19 response mission. This includes its sold out "Egg-A-Palooza" fundraiser, and an upcoming poker night.

"Egg-A-Palooza" was modeled after the museum's popular Gingerbread House at Home Fundraiser. "Egg-A-Palooza" allows families safely enjoying one of the museum's longstanding community events, the Mad Hatter Egg Hunt.

"When I realized that we'd have to cancel the Mad Hatter Egg Hunt this year, I don't know who was more disappointed . . . me or my boys," said Long. "I'm grateful that the museum staff continues to think up innovative ideas that allow families to enjoy CMEE while allowing us to serve the East End's most vulnerable."

Families were invited to purchase and pick up take-home egg hunt kits, each including complimentary donut from Grindstone Donuts in Sag Harbor.

All money raised during "Egg-A-Palooza" goes directly to the families served by the museum's Food 2 Play initiative.

Former NBA All Star and Knicks power forward, Charles Oakley will host CMEE's Virtual Poker Night Fundraiser on Thursday, April 8. All money raised during the online event will also directly benefit museum's ongoing Covid-19 response efforts.

"I'm delighted that the 'Oak Tree' himself is joining in our efforts to ensure that the vital needs of the most vulnerable in our community are being met," said Long. "If his talent at the table is anything like his skill on the court, the night is sure to be as competitive as it is fun."

Utilizing the same poker platform used by the World Poker Tour, ClubWPT, CMEE supporters will compete in a No Limit Texas Hold'em tournament with progressive blinds. The evening's top performing players will win prizes like a rum and cigar set from Diplomati-

co, a basketball signed by NBA Hall-of-Famer Walt "Clyde" Frasier (plus a gift card to spend in his celebrated Hell's Kitchen restaurant), or dinner at Scarpetta Beach at Gurney's Montauk.

"Though it's been a tough year for everyone, CMEE has continued to offer families hope for the future," said museum trustee, Kevin Dudley. "The money raised during this event will enable the museum to make even more of an impact in the lives of children living in the East End."

Tickets start at $300 per player. Businesses can purchase a branded, dedicated table for eight players for $2,500.

Over the past year, the museum has also hosted virtual support groups to help families cope with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. To combat summer learning loss, CMEE also launched a digital Literacy Club and distributed about 200 books to low-income families.

The museum itself is now open to the public at limited capacity, following all CDC guidelines.

For more info, visit www.cmee.org.