'Exciting and humbling' -- Ray Laursen on being named one of Hall's Unsung Heroes

The Unsung Heroes pose with their awards at Saturday's ceremony. (Courtesy of Danny Ingellis)

By Joe D'Amadio | damdio@siadvance.com

Email the author | Follow on Twitter

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No doubt, Ray Laursen Sr. is one of the biggest names in the local bowling world. Now he's carving his niche and becoming known in the rest of the community. That was quite evident as Laursen, the Rab's Country Lanes' house pro, and nine others were honored Saturday morning as Unsung Heroes by the Staten Island Sports Hall of Fame.
The Unsung Heroes program recognizes deserving individuals and groups who work behind the scenes to support not only athletics in this borough, but the community in general.

"I looked in the program and saw all the people that were honored before me and it was quite exciting and humbling," said the modest Laursen, who has contributed so much to the community through bowling and beyond. "The list was very (prestigious). There are a lot of people there that contributed through sports and outside of sports on the Island."

Making the event even more special for Laursen was that he was honored alongside two other businessmen -- Sal Sottile of Sottile Securities and Jeff Henick of Stop & Stor -- who like Laursen are involved with the Staten Island Bucks, a group composed of 70 of the elite businesses on Staten Island. The group meets each week to discuss
how to improve their businesses and educate themselves with better business practices.

"They are good guys," said Laursen. "Sal does a lot in the community for Blue Lives Matter and Jeff does a lot, too."

This is not the first time Laursen has been recognized for his community service. He was a recipient last year of a Joe Ryan Memorial Award, which honors groups or individuals who have made significant contributions to Staten Island sports and the community over a period of time.

He thinks his recognition may open the door for more bowlers entering the Staten Island Sports Hall of Fame. To date only two -- Ben McNeovich and Dom LaBargo -- are in the S.I. Sports Hall of Fame.

"There's been some clamoring to get more bowlers into the Staten Island Sports Hall," explained Laursen. "Today I think was a good start that the bowlers are getting noticed."

**Saturday's honorees**

**Robert Carter**

NYPD detective Robert Carter, a former McKee/S.I. Tech basketball player assigned to the mayor's security detail, was jogging with his partner on their lunch break when they recognized and apprehended a suspect wanted for mugging an 85-year-old retired doctor.

**Solomon Chemo**

A former Advance All-Star football player, Solomon Chemo is a former chairman of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce and the Good Scout Dinner-Dance committee, and a founder of the Sunrise Camp for childhood cancer patients.
Matt Gaor

A longtime volunteer leader in Boy Scouts, Matt Gaor has run city, state and national scouting events including jamborees and pinewood derbies, and has partnered with the FBI to give seminars on keeping children safe on the internet.

Diane Hesterhagen

As the principal at St. Adalbert’s School in Elm Park, Diane Hesterhagen has been a champion for veterans and first responders, hosting Veteran’s Day luncheons, sock drives for homeless vets, and bake sales to help pay off the mortgages of slain police officers.

Jeff Henick

Neighborhood philanthropist Jeff Henick has aided dozens of organizations as diverse as Meals on Wheels and Wounded Warriors through his Stop & Stor Charitable Foundation, which has made $2 million in charitable donations.

Ray Laursen

A longtime top bowler, volunteer coach at Curtis and St. Joseph by-the-Sea High Schools, and the proprietor of the pro shop at Rab’s Country Lanes, Ray Laursen has run bowlathons that have raised thousands of dollars for local causes.

Luke Nasta

The executive director of Camelot Counseling Centers, Luke Nasta has spent a lifetime on the front lines of the battle against drug addiction, both as a counselor and an advocate for greater education, prevention and treatment services.

Mike Ricardelli

A career educator and volunteer Little League and Babe Ruth League coach, Mike Ricardelli started basketball and track programs at PS 44, Mariners Harbor, as well as a summer camp for neighborhood children.
Sal Sottile

A retired New York City policeman, Sal Sottile has dedicated himself to helping the widows and families of fallen officers, and is one of the organizers of the Blue Lives Matter rallies in support of that same cause.

Tom Valledolmo

A longtime sportswriter, editor and handicapper at the Staten Island Advance and the New York Post, and the author of *Something Bad Happen, Please*, Tom Valledolmo gave back as a volunteer CYO and high school basketball coach.