

FEATURED

BACKING THE BLUE

Former boxer hosting 'Back the Blue' event

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Ray Ciancaglini stands in front of several photos taken during his boxing career.
Mike Hibbard / Finger Lakes Times

GENEVA — Fresh off a successful fundraiser for the Geneva Fire Department, well-known former boxer Ray Ciancaglini is hosting a benefit dinner/auction for the city police department.

“The thing about first responders is the pressure they are under and they put their lives on the line constantly,” Ciancaglini said. “They lead a tough life — a life of sacrifice.”

The "Back the Blue" event is scheduled for Dec. 1 at Ventosa Vineyards in Fayette. Ciancaglini, a former Geneva resident who now lives in Romulus, is the founder of The Second Impact Foundation and has spoken extensively on concussion awareness.

Now 71, he has been battling Parkinson's disease and dementia pugilistica for years. Ciancaglini started the foundation as a way to tell his story of the mistakes he made not properly addressing concussions and the lifelong consequences he suffered as a result.

"I wasn't big on authority when I was a kid ... and I think some of that was from the effects I sustained as a youth boxer," he said. "That's not an excuse for the way I acted ... but it took me a long time to respect police and authority. My outlook is 'It's not how you start the race. It's how you finish it.'"

Ciancaglini hosted a benefit for the fire department in October that raised \$10,000. The Dec. 1 event, which is expected to draw more than 300 people, will follow that format, with proceeds going to the Police Benevolent Association.

"Mr. Ciancaglini is a pillar in the community. Ray is an exceptional person who never stops giving back, regardless if it's locally or nationally," city police Chief Mike Passalacqua said. "I am honored to know Ray. I can't thank him enough for all he has done, is doing and will do in the future for our city and country."

As is the case for all of Ciancaglini's benefit events, due to his many connections there will be plenty of sports memorabilia up for auction. That will include a jersey signed by Hobart College football great and Super Bowl-winning NFL player Ali Marpet; a helmet autographed by Pro Football Hall of Famer Joe Namath; and a plaque from baseball Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan.

Numerous items have been donated by local businesses, including a boat tour valued at \$1,000; large-screen TVs; a reclining chair; and a 7-foot artificial Christmas tree. Many other donated items will be auctioned off or given away as door prizes.

"I can't guarantee this, but everybody should leave with something," Ciancaglini said. "The local businesses are very generous and have been good to me over the years. If you are good to people, they will be good in return."

The emcee will be local radio personality Ted Baker. Speakers will include Ciancaglini, Passalacqua, state Sen. Pam Helming, state Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan, and Erika Van Savage, the wife of GPD Officer John Van Savage.

Ciancaglini said he is working with Erika Van Savage and former city councilor Paul D'Amico on the event. He plans to combine the fire and police benefits into an annual fundraiser starting next year, making it an overall tribute to local first responders.

"I am so proud to be from Geneva," he said. "This community means a lot to me."

If You Go

Limited tickets remain for Ray Ciancaglini's Dec. 1 banquet fundraiser for the Geneva Police Department at Ventosa Vineyards. A cocktail hour begins at 6 p.m, followed by dinner at 7 o'clock.

Tickets, at \$50 each, can be purchased by contacting Erika Van Savage at (315) 945-7594 or Paul D'Amico at (585) 820-8243.