

'SPECTACULAR'

Former boxer Ray Ciancaglini organizes benefit for GFD, which draws praise from Chief Parrotta

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GENEVA — In June, Ray Ciancaglini organized an "Honor Your Role Model" night at McDonough Park that included the Geneva Fire Department, city police, and other organizations.

It was there that he met new Geneva Fire Chief Del Parrotta.

"He's a pretty young guy, but he's got a lot of good ideas and I liked him right away," Ciancaglini said during a recent interview at his East Lake Road home in Romulus. "He wants to improve morale."

Shortly after that meeting, Ciancaglini — a well-known former boxer who has made dozens

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Ray Ciancaglini stands in the memorabilia room of his Seneca County home, a place that showcases many items from his boxing career.

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of speaking appearances to talk about concussion awareness — told his story to local firefighters during a firehouse meeting.

"I was so impressed by his story, his legacy and desire to help everyone out," Parrotta said. "From kids in sports to pro athletes and now first responders, his efforts are nothing short of spectacular."

Ciancaglini, however, wasn't content with just talking. He began organizing an Oct. 6 banquet at Belhurst Castle that will serve as a fundraiser for the fire department, helping it update some of its equipment.

When he was about 16 and growing up in Geneva, Ciancaglini said a building he inherited from his late father caught fire. He went to the scene and tried to rescue a tenant inside.

"Next thing I know, a fireman grabbed the tenant and dragged him out. It gave me a real respect for firemen," he recalled. "Every time that alarm goes off, they don't know what they are going to and they put their lives on the line. We need to help them as much as we can."

While Ciancaglini's story is well known to family and friends, it may not be to the general public. He won 31 of 44 amateur fights, mostly in the Buffalo area, and believes he had his first concussion at the age of 16 — if not before.

"I didn't care who it was I was going up against. I loved to get in the ring and loved to scrap," he said. "I didn't have any fear ... and probably shouldn't have fought sometimes when I did."

He could not get a professional boxing license in New York after a neurologist diagnosed him with possible brain damage, so he fought for several years in the south

If you go ...

Tickets remain for Ray Ciancaglini's Oct. 6 banquet fundraiser for the Geneva Fire Department at Belhurst Castle. A cocktail hour begins at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 7 p.m.

Tickets, at \$50 each, can be purchased at the Geneva Fire Department, Dana's Time Out, Sons of Italy, Barood's Cigar Store, and Pedulla's Liquor Store.

The fundraiser also includes raffles of memorabilia obtained by Ciancaglini, who will be one of several speakers along with Geneva Fire Chief Del Parrotta and longtime Geneva fire officer Jimmer McCormack.

The emcee is local radio personality Ted Baker.

— including many bouts in Mexico — and likely suffered many more concussions.

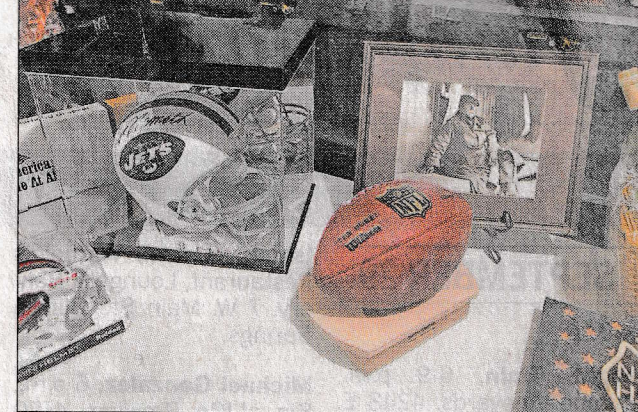
"I remember taking two fights in a week. The money was tremendous ... but I started having these headaches and they got worse," he said. "The harder I worked, the worse the headaches got." Ciancaglini came back to New York and saw the same neurologist, who diagnosed frontal lobe brain trauma. Even then, he was reluctant to quit.

"She said, 'You have to stop (fighting) now.' I was 23 at the time," he recalled. "I thought I would take a couple of months off and it would go away. It didn't ... I hung up the gloves."

Ciancaglini said after driving around the country and trying to avoid people, he returned to New York but couldn't hold a job.

"By then, the (hand) tremors were visible and I was diagnosed with grade 2 dementia — pugilistic dementia and some kind of syndrome," he said.

Ciancaglini was later the subject of a book,



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The Oct. 6 banquet fundraiser at Belhurst Castle will include raffles of sports memorabilia, including a New York Jets helmet signed by Super Bowl-winning quarterback Joe Namath. Event organizer Ray Ciancaglini said the helmet was donated by Ron Cecere, owner of Eddie O'Briens. Raffle prizes also include items donated by area businesses.

"Second Impact: The Ray Ciancaglini Story," and founded The Second Impact foundation. Today, at the age of 71, he has good days and bad days, taking medication when he has a public function.

"I am on a neuro-stimulant but can't take it all the time," he said, crediting his wife of more than 40 years, Patti, for taking good care of him. "Mine is not a disease, it's a brain damage ... from my own doing. They tell me it's like a tree. When you damage the roots, the tree doesn't die right away. It takes quite a while."

"I've held this at bay, and the key is support from family and friends, eating right, some exercise," he added. "No drinking, no smoking, no drugs."

The Oct. 6 dinner — Ciancaglini said he plans to make it an annual event — will include raffles of numerous prizes, some authentic sports

memorabilia from Ciancaglini's many connections over the years, and donations from local businesses. He is planning a similar event in December, at Ventosa Vineyards, to support the Geneva Police Department.

"I developed an attitude toward authority figures when I was a kid," he said. "Today I have a lot of respect for them and want to help however I can."

"After that first meeting, Ray approached me about setting up a fundraiser for the fire department. I put him in touch with our Firematics president and treasurer, and together they have set up what I think will be a pretty amazing event," Parrotta said. "The effort and tenacity of Mr. Ciancaglini is such an amazing gift. That guy is a fighter. Just the thought of his willingness to try and help our department is so heartwarming."