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Support and Encouragement for Brain Injury Sufferers

By: Kate McGowan

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, and to recognize the importance of brain injury treatments, the Hickok Center for Brain Injury held their third Annual Brain Waves Benefit Sunday.

Some have dedicated their lives to helping those who have suffered from a brain injury. Those who provide support, and even those who have been affected by this type of injury, gathered in Webster Sunday. All to raise funds and crucial awareness.

It's a mission designed to support and encourage.

"With brain trauma, everyone needs to have support. You can't battle it alone," said Ray Ciancaglini.

As a former boxer, Ray was well aware of the risks he was taking each time he entered the ring.

Ray suffered two serious concussions within a week of each other while boxing. He now faces memory loss, tremors and headaches daily.

"There's a constant fog you're in. Some days are better, some days are worse," said Ciancaglini.

Ray now spends his time speaking out at schools and to students about the seriousness of brain injuries. Ray has also been instrumental in helping pass state legislation on concussion management in youth sports.

"He's a true champion in my book," said Rochester police officer, Anthony DiPonzio.

Ray's efforts have not gone unnoticed. At Sunday's event, Ray received the Community Hero Award and was greeted with a standing ovation.

"I've had a lot of trophies at home but this one here means more than anything," said Ciancaglini.

DiPonzio said, "Absolutely incredible for me, ya know with Ray's story, he's definitely someone I can look up to."

The Hickok Center for Brain Injury, a Rochester agency that helps brain injury survivors, says they are inspired by both Ray and DiPonzio.

DiPonzio was the recipient of last year's award after he was shot in the head while on duty and critically injured. Both men have battled through their injuries and are now providing support to others.

"We want to let people know about the issues of brain injury and that there's so many people around them that have it and they don't even know," said Hickok Center's CEO, Elaine Comarella.

With more than a hundred in attendance, the event raised more than \$5,000 for the Hickok Center.

Ray said the center and those involved provide hope to many men and women in need.

"One of the luckiest days of my life was the day I walked into the front door of the Hickok Center."