

## WINNING STRATEGIES

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### Resident exceeds goal

By Tracy A. Politowicz, Managing Editor

SPRINGFIELD, NJ — With the theme from “Rocky” blaring in the background, township resident Ted Stampoulos stepped on to a scale. Hundreds of people waited for his personal trainer to announce the results.

“Two hundred eleven and a half pounds,” said Dave D’Addio, using a microphone to ensure everyone heard.

That number means a local nonprofit organization will receive approximately \$22,000, the amount of money raised by Stampoulos in conjunction with his 31½-pound weight loss.

His final weigh-in at the Martini Bistro & Bar restaurant in Millburn on Aug. 31 concluded a three-month diet and exercise program during which he sought pledges for each pound he lost.

“I was shocked at the amount of weight I lost,” said Stampoulos, who began his new regime at the end of May weighing 243 pounds.

“It just proves that, when you set a goal, you can reach it,” said D’Addio, who donated four weekly personal training sessions, helping his friend exceed his goal of losing at least 22 pounds.

The benefactor of Stampoulos’ donation is Opportunity Project, an organization that allows people with brain injuries to participate in a work-oriented environment to develop practical, functional community and work living skills.

Because his older sister Rosanne is a six-year survivor of brain cancer, he wanted to raise awareness of the Millburn-based organization.

“Ted called us to talk about a fund-raiser,” said Carol Albanese, executive director of Opportunity Project, recalling her first contact with Stampoulos in the middle of May.

“We set up a meeting, where he brought his own scale and presented his plan. “It sounded wonderful,” she said. “And the rest is kind of history.”

Opportunity Project’s history in Millburn began in 1993. Co-founder Rita Yohalem’s son, Gary, had suffered a brain injury two years earlier at the age of 19.

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“Survivors of brain injuries go back to their life knowing what their life was like previously,” said Yohalem. “There is no support beyond the medical (treatment), although they know their limitations, their differences.”

Her son, Gary, agrees. “OP is the only opportunity for people with head injuries to return to a ‘normal’ life,” he said. “If you want to move on, move up or need help, they are there for you.”

Barbara, an Opportunity Project member, spoke on behalf of the organization at the weigh-in. Although she sat in a wheelchair, her confident and clear voice claimed the attention of the crowd.

“OP is a place where I can be myself,” she said, “Each person is like me. We all hurt at one time or another. Just being at Opportunity Project makes us feel better.”

Barbara works at Opportunity Project’s office sorting mail, writing a newsletter for members and as a receptionist.

“‘I’ll patch you right through’ is Barbara’s catch phrase,” said Albanese. “She cracks me up.”

Albanese’s support of Barbara is indicative of Opportunity Project’s goal to “help them (people with brain injuries) find their way back to work, back to school,” according to Yohalem.

That philosophy extends beyond the organization, according to Albanese. “Ted is representative of our supportive community, which is why our program is flourishing,” she said. “He is bringing new people and new awareness.” Stampoulos’ wife, Diane, had agreed that his weight loss plan for charity was “a great idea” but had doubts as to whether he could “stick with it.”

“He used to laugh at me drinking my coffee with skim milk and then he had to do it,” said the pretty blonde.

“I’ve always been a healthy eater and I cook healthy. It wasn’t my fault he gained weight; it was the restaurants,” she said with a smile.

Stampoulos owns three restaurants: Martini Bistro & Bar — where the weigh-in took place — and Pizzeta, side-by-side in Millburn, and Pizzeta Enoteca in Livingston.

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Because she was seven months pregnant at the time he began his program, Diane told her husband it was “not a good time for you to be on a diet.” Not only was she was gaining weight, but she was allowing herself some food indulgences.

“It was tough to have chocolate cake in front of him, but I had no choice; I was pregnant,” said Diane.

Although Stampoulos, 45, said losing weight was harder than he thought it would be, he is committed to maintaining his healthier lifestyle.

“I will continue with my personal trainer. He did a wonderful job, having to keep me in line, keep me in check,” said Stampoulos.

“The original goal I gave him did not go to extremes,” said D’Addio. “The weight loss was done intelligently. There was no major sacrificing, just exercise and portion control.” He said occasional cheating was acceptable, so one didn’t feel deprived.

Stampoulos adopted that philosophy. “I treated myself over the weekend,” admitted Stampoulos on Tuesday. “I hadn’t had a nice bowl of pasta in a while.”



*Springfield resident Ted Stampoulos, with his sister Roseanne.*