

## In Search of Heroes

By

Rich Forliano and Sheila Marcotte

A majority of the students enrolled in the alumni history camp at the Eastchester Historical Society the week of July 26 to July 30 have been coming to the history camp for four years. We felt it was important for the participants to continue to have new experiences that would build on what they had learned in the past. The topic that was picked is "What is a hero?" and the end result was that the participants would select their own Hall of Fame for the town of Eastchester including the villages of Tuckahoe and Bronxville.

Why this topic? Young people need role models and sadly in contemporary culture there are few. Also we were inspired by the great exhibit prepared by Mike Fix entitled "The Hero Next Door", the intimate stories enshrined in panels of the people from the town of Eastchester who gave their lives in 20th century wars. Another incentive to exploring this topic is that over the last three years a number of town residents have been uncovered and researched whose contributions were worthy of consideration.

What could be better than having these young people learn about people who they could admire. So we took a risk and prayed that the participants would not be bored or even worse feel that they were victims of a manipulative attempt to preach and shape their values. Fortunately that did not happen.

Highlights of the week

Our first speaker was Jay Summer, a holocaust survivor who was the same age as these young people when this horrendous crime against humanity took place. After the World War 2 was over Jay migrated to the United States with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education. By 1982 he was selected as the National Teacher of the Year. He shared his story of hope and sadness with the young people and showed them firsthand what a hero is.

Then the group had to come up with a definition of a hero. They were given a copy of 28 quotes from a variety of historical figures on leadership and heroism. The definition of hero that the group reached a consensus on was **"A hero is a person who is persistent, passionate, courageous, undaunted by failure, and whose achievements stand the test of time."**

Then we went on two days of field trips in search of information and heroes. We stopped at the original hall of fame in New York City, went to village hall in Tuckahoe and town hall in Eastchester, saw the Yaeger Collection at Concordia College that includes notable autograph collections of American financiers and makers of wealth that typify the entrepreneurial spirit of America. (Mike Fix was gracious enough to guide us through this collection as well as give us personal insights into his display on "The Hero Next Store" that is now at the LeRoy Gregory Post.) Vito Pinto also addressed the participants on the sacrifices of veterans. Also during the week we saw the video, *Cinderella Man*, the story of James Braddock who went from a washed up boxer on the unemployment line to becoming the heavy weight champion of the world.

By the end of the week we were exposed to hundreds of heroes both local and national. The participants were asked to narrow their selection down to ten people and/or groups that would go down in their hall of fame.

**Their choices will be listed in chronological order with a brief explanation of why they were chosen.**

### **Alumni History Camp (2010)**

**Anne Hutchinson- First European resident of this area who as a woman dared to speak out against the Puritan dictatorship in Massachusetts, risked execution, and eventually made her way to this town where she was massacred by Native Americans.**

**AT Stewart- Developed the first department store in New York City and performed many acts of philanthropy like sending a boat full of food and supplies to Ireland during the potato famine.**

**William Van Duzer Lawrence- developed the first true railway suburbs in America in Bronxville, was responsible for the building of Lawrence Hospital, and Sarah Lawrence College.**

**The Thirties and Forties Generation- The generation of the nineteen thirties was the one whose courage and dedication guided us through the depression and endured two world wars. In 1941 the “Greatest Generation” went off to fight World War 2 with the values of county, god and community that they learned from their parents in the thirties.**

**Jack and Ina Polak- Holocaust survivors and Tuckahoe residents who have done invaluable work educating people about not only the horrors of this horrific event but also what must be done to avoid repeating it. In 1982 Jack was knighted by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands for his work with the Anne Frank Center. Their book and movie *Steal a Pencil for Me* about their experiences and love for each other has inspired countless people.**

**Trudy Elion- Who with Robert Hitchings while they were employed by the drug company Burroughs Welcome in Tuckahoe found a cure for childhood leukemia. In 1990 both scientists received the Nobel Prize for medicine. Trudy Elion’s life is described in Tom Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation*.**

**Harriet Biachi and Phyllis Knowles- completed the arduous task of transcribing massive volumes of Eastchester public records dating back to 1665. Their painstaking efforts have afforded Eastchester with some of the oldest records of any community in the United States.**

**Robert Murray- a Tuckahoe resident, was awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor, for throwing himself on a grenade saving his platoon in Vietnam.**

**Michael Frey and all the emergency response teams in town who risk their lives so that the citizens of the town can live in a health and secure environment. Michael was the only Eastchester policeman to be killed in the line of duty when he was shot and killed by a sniper in 1996**

**Ronald Bucca- Tuckahoe resident, fire marshal, Special Forces operative, and community volunteer who was on the 78<sup>th</sup> floor of the World Trade Center when it collapsed. Ron was saving other lives and knew beforehand of the many dangers. He did not have to be up there.**

In some form every school child should in some form look back to the distant and not so distant past to find models to guide their behavior on.

rtartic