

# Jim Ryan: Man of the Year in Civics

BY PATRICIA PROVEN

Northport resident Jim Ryan has been selected as *The Times of Northport's* Man of the Year in Civics for the scope of his work helping citizens attend to the practical, personal and spiritual aspects of their lives.

Ryan, a former French teacher and Northport resident for 32 years, works as a financial planner for LPL Financial Services and serves as president of Northport Rotary. He also counsels DWI convicts who have been sentenced to the county sheriff's DWI Alternative Facility in Yaphank. In the past year, he has helped launch an informal community forum and has continued his regional circuit of motivational speaking on "The Art of Happiness," based on his personal mantra, which also forms the basis for his upcoming book. He's also a musician.

Retired Spanish teacher Lois Baisley, who worked in the foreign language department with Ryan during his 14-year tenure in Bethpage School District, recalled how Ryan livened up classes, sometimes bringing his guitar to class and singing in French. "The students liked that," Baisley said. "He was very, very well-loved. He was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful guidance counselor. He's a very kind caring person."

Long after both left the district, Baisley keeps a number handy for Jim Ryan, whose work involves mutual funds.

"I have investments with him because I trust him so completely," Baisley said, adding that Ryan has made better profit for her, percentage-wise, than financial planners with bigger companies have.

Northport resident Jean Snyder said the Rotary's fundraising success this year owes much to Ryan. "Jim has been terrific," she said. "It really depends on the leader and ... I think because of our fundraising activities that he has spearheaded, we are able to give this money to the Gift of Life."

This year was a record-breaking one for Rotary; its annual Wine in the Courtyard fundraiser at the Vanderbilt

Mansion in Centerport raised \$40,000 to help bring children from impoverished nations to the United States for life-saving heart surgeries, performed locally at Stony Brook University Hospital.

Jonathan Scherr, who directs the county sheriff department's DWI Alternative Facility, has seen Ryan's impact as a counselor to men at the alternative facility. "He has such a positive attitude on life, in a place [where] a lot of people are depressed, away from their families, and they don't know what's going to happen when they get out."

Offenders typically serve one to four months at the alternative facility. As part of their probation, they are required to attend either Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. Ryan, who was referred through the Diocese of Rockville Centre's prison ministry, welcomes the men to call him any time after their release, Scherr said. Many of the men do seek his counsel.

"He's one of the few that most of the men will remember the things that he says," Scherr said. "He has such a different attitude than many people. It's just always positive, that things are always going to get better."

What is it about his message that makes the difference? Scherr said, "Just that life is so wonderful, and there are people out there who love you and help you if let them."

He said he believes Ryan deserves recognition. "It's like he gives much more than he receives," Scherr said. While he guesses that Ryan gets much personal satisfaction from helping people, he said, "I think the people he talks to and counsel get more."

Northport resident and Rotarian Ann Stevens said, "Jim is a warm, generous spirit who gives much to Rotary, to the Northport community and beyond.... It's wonderful to see that such a well-deserving person is receiving your award."

She added, "Because of Jim's musical talents, I guess I have a special connec-



Fils photo

Jim Ryan pictured earlier this year at a Consciousness in the Courtyard meeting that he helped organize in Northport.

tion with him. The night he was installed as president at the Rotary Inaugural Dinner, he made the decision that music would be the order of the evening rather than speeches. And it was my personal pleasure to have accompanied him when he treated all the Rotarians to his singing."

Northport-East Northport Public Library Director Stephanie Heineman has also known Ryan through Rotary for five years. "I feel very close to him as a person that I can rely on and that I can feel a bond of friendship with," she said. "In the Rotary we talk about service above self as our governance by which we live, and I think that that's a true

statement of Jim's community work and his dedication to making things better in the world."

Meditation teacher and Northport resident Maggie Kalas worked with Ryan in helping to launch Consciousness in the Courtyard, a loose forum for public discussion that met four times between August and November.

Kalas said, "I happened to be doing my work [as a] Reiki master on the benefits of joy. He was doing work on the art of happiness. We wanted to help people get into a good place on whatever subject was out there, to raise consciousness on a more individual level, on how

*Continued on page A19*




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Continued

Business

Continued from page A4

is a far cry from karaoke night at the local watering hole. The second Friday night is Opera Night and the third Friday is the Poets-in-Port performance series. Another Friday is open mike for musicians and other performers. Three or four nights a week, other musicians perform. In general, the poets and musical acts are from Northport, East Northport and other nearby towns.

Turnout can vary. As Gary noted, "If the musician is someone who has his or her own following, their performance will be well-attended but, if it's someone who isn't that well known, the turnout may be a bit sparse."

**'It's a real comfortable place for people who live and work near Main Street to come into. That's the fun part. It's the people who stop by, day in and day out.'**

—CONNIE CRESPIN

Cathy Kreger, a folk and blues singer who has performed for Poets-in-Port, said she finds a benefit in the cozy quarters and small crowds. "I found it to be a very nice room. It almost forces you to be quiet," she said, adding that audiences at larger clubs often drown out live music with conversation and noise. Because Caffè Portofino is so tight, the audience pays attention and "hears the whole song." For an artist, she said, that is exceptionally gratifying.

Regardless of the turnout on any given night, Main Street clearly has a new attraction. As anyone

who has ever been to Northport knows, the heart of the village sits on the blocks nearest the harbor. Beyond the Northport firehouse, Main Street quiets down fairly quickly. This disparity was only aggravated when the Northport Theater shut down a few years ago.

But a new owner has purchased the theater and plans to turn it into a showplace for live performances, and with the Crespins running their version of a Greenwich Village-like coffee shop, the sleepy end of Main Street is waking up.

Inside the café, the walls are chock full of paintings, sketches and photographs from local artists, many of which customers can purchase.

Perhaps one of the coffee shop's greatest charms is that events don't need to be scheduled far in advance. "We often get people who come in, sit down at the piano and start these little concerts," Connie said. In fact, one such impromptu recital led to the monthly Opera Night series.

Isabella Eredita Johnson, chairwoman of the Northport Arts Coalition (NAC), said she's always looking for more places to hold events. One night in early 2004, she happened upon Caffè Portofino and quickly found her way to the piano. One thing led to another and soon Opera Night was born. Eredita-Johnson said, "It's a wonderful, delightful venue."

In January, the Poets-in-Port series got started under NAC advisory board member Kate Kelly's baton. Kelly said, "It's just a very relaxed and supportive atmosphere for the arts. We welcome anyone from anywhere to come and join in."

Some artists who have performed at Caffè Portofino said that the performance series has become an important part of their work. Frank Esposito, a Huntington resident, has some of his photographs hanging on the walls above the cream and sugar table and has read his material on poetry nights. For him, a live performance with the direct response that only a live audience can give, "is the pinnacle of the creative process."

For Gary and Connie, the café has turned into a second home of sorts.

"It's a real comfortable place for people who live and work near Main Street to come into," Connie said. "That's the fun part. It's the people who stop by, day in and day out."

Civics

Continued from page A5

to find a good place within you, and how life would change from this perspective."

The pair is now collaborating on a full-day meditation workshop, called The Joy Ride of Life, planned for January 21, 2006, for which Ryan offered to host about 10 adults in his Victorian-style home.

Kalas added, "Jim is really very good at articulating some very deep thoughts into some very simple place, so it doesn't sound very far-fetched.... He's a very down-to-earth person."

Recently, she said, Ryan's goals have been leading him toward more motivational speaking. One of the rewarding aspects for Ryan has been how wonderfully people respond.

"He's well received," she said. "He is such a gentle soul, his approach so easy to receive. He always does things from the heart."

Health

Continued from page A13

research in the laboratory.

"This is an orphan disease that needs attention," she said. "The students at Northport High School are giving ALS the proper attention and hopefully we will be able to offer this program at the Packard Center nationally. We are helping to build researchers and doctors to continue this research."

ALS victims and the Packard Center are not the only groups to have recognized the students' drive to

find a cure. On September 4, 2005 Wings Over Wall Street, the largest New York State ALS organizer, honored the Northport high schoolers' for their collaborative efforts, Strasser said.

A dozen of last year's honor society members who have gone on to college plan on attending the upcoming event at Oheka Castle, which will also include a visit from former New York Yankee Tommy John and the raffling of a 2006 Ford Mustang. "I'm really proud of these students, because they have taken on a challenge and are supporting the teachers they love," Strasser said. "As they graduate from the high school, they take their knowledge to the colleges and will continue to make strides in fundraising efforts for ALS in the future. They are truly remarkable."

Pendergast said, "When ALS gets cured or a significant treatment comes along, it will be interesting to see what these young men and women feel. It will be interesting to see their reactions in three to five years when a breakthrough drug has been found and the long journey was made possible through their efforts."

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—CHRIS PENDERGAST

Sports

Continued from page A17

the women's 50 to 54 age group. Martin's individual world records all came in the indoor mile and were all set at the Armory Track & Field Center.

That year, *Running Times* magazine selected Martin as the number-one female roadracer. She participated in the 21st annual Vytra Health Plans Long Island Women's 5K run in 2004 and placed 12th overall. In addition, she competed in the 25th annual Veterans Day Cross Country 4K Run, placing first in the female 50 to 54 age group.

In 1999, Martin was Long Island's top Masters (age 40-plus) runner and excelled at every distance from short track events to the Half Marathon. She also competed in the Canon Long Island Half Marathon and was the second woman finisher overall and first Masters finisher that year.

Nike approached Martin in 2003 to do a commercial promoting their line of footwear. She was featured in a 30-second television spot, which highlighted her running in the woods.

"Her running record speaks for itself," Gandner said. "Not only is she a champion runner, she is a champion in the community because she assists in many organizations. She has made such an impact, locally and nationally."

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