



Laureno plaque may be lost forever

John Nickerson

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The plaque at John Sharkey Memorial Field at Scalzi Park was reported stolen after it had been pried off a stone pillar. Photo: The (Stamford) Advocate

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STAMFORD -- It was 25 years ago, but **John T. Laureno** remembers Aug. 22, 1987, very clearly.

He was at Scalzi Park with 75 or 80 other people to celebrate and memorialize his grandfather's life of sports in Stamford with a large bronze plaque at what was then named John "Sharkey" Laureno Memorial Field.

While he was only 8 years old when his grandfather died that January, Laureno on Monday morning said, "I remember being there and all the people and how special it felt that they were honoring my grandfather."

Last Wednesday, the plaque, valued at about \$5,500, was stolen -- pried off a stone pillar that six months earlier had been moved to the backstop of the field near the park's Bridge Street entrance.

"The memorial was meant to be a tribute to my grandfather for all that he accomplished over the years as a positive influence on the youth of the city of Stamford, both on and off the playing field," Laureno said in an email. "Whether the plaque is there or not, my grandfather's legacy will always be intact."

"Still, I have always taken great pride in seeing his memorial at Scalzi Park and what it represents, and I hope that the plaque will be returned to its rightful place soon."

But police say they hold out little hope for its return.

Sgt. Peter diSpagna said the plaque will probably be cut up into small pieces or melted down before it is brought to a metal recycler and sold for about \$1.70 a pound, a total of about \$340.

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State law requires scrap dealers to report to police any identifiable plaques that are brought to them.

"The bad guys know that they have to cut it up so it is unidentifiable, so it's just a pile of metal. If we go looking for it, the only thing we are going to find are scraps."

diSpagna said. "The bad guys know what the good guys are looking for."

Carl Caputo, who remembered playing on three of Laureno's Babe Ruth baseball teams as a teenager in 1957 and 1958, and on a 1959 All Star team that went to Stockton, Calif., to play in the Babe Ruth World Series, said he can't believe someone would steal and sell for scrap such an endearing reminder of a Stamford sports icon.

"Sharkey has always been very kind to me and all the players. We always looked up to him because he was such a success," Caputo said.

He was later able to pay back Laureno a little when, as owner of Fairfield Monuments in 1987, he helped create the bronze plaque for Scalzi Park.

Caputo said he remembers the 36-inch by 36-inch solid bronze plaque weighed 180 to 200 pounds, and it took two men to hold it while it was being screwed and epoxied into a niche carved into the big stone monument.

"Sharkey was the greatest, and I remember how much fun it was to be 15 years old and playing for him," Caputo said.

In hopes of being able to replace and replicate the plaque, Caputo said he is going to find the original template in his company's archives. "I want to do everything I can to find out where the original paperwork is and go on from there," Caputo said.

Sky Mercede, 52, who moved to Florida when he was 10 and returned to Stamford two years ago, never met Laureno, but he was touched when he heard the man's plaque had been stolen.

"When someone hits you in the heart, you have to do something about it," he said, explaining he wants to help organize a fund to replace the plaque. Mercede said he will donate the first \$100.

"If we can get word out to the community, I'm sure people will be generous," he said. "I think it is terrible that someone would steal that plaque. I don't know a lot about Sharkey, but I can just imagine what he did to earn that. You don't just put up a bronze plaque if someone didn't do something fantastic."



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Nothing is sacred anymore in Stamford. Nothing of value is safe left unattended any longer. We have to constantly protect ourselves and our belongings in ways never before necessary. This city is going down the tubes. I am very sorry to the Laurenno family that Stamford's ever increasing crime rate has directly effected their family this way.

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