



Plaque honoring Stamford sports icon stolen

John Nickerson

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STAMFORD -- A bronze plaque dedicated to Stamford sports icon **John "Sharkey" Lauren** was stolen from Scalzi Park over the past week, police said.

The 25- to 50-pound plaque, worth as much as \$5,500 but much less as scrap metal, was pried off a stone pillar behind a softball diamond near the entrance to the park, Sgt. Peter diSpagna said.

The theft was reported Thursday morning.

City **Tree Warden Phil D'Amico** said he confirmed the theft of the plaque and reported it to police.

"This is a shame. It is a disgrace. It is unbelievable," D'Amico said. "Find something else to do with your time," he scolded the thieves.

D'Amico said the plaque was last seen about a week ago. D'Amico said he did not know of any other plaques being stolen from city parks.

Lauren, who died in 1987 at the age of 75, was one of the founders of **Stamford Babe Ruth Baseball**. The Sharkey Lauren Memorial Baseball Tournament and Scholarship Event has been conducted at Cubeta Stadium in the park for more than 25 years.

Questions to city hall employees and baseball historians around the city to find out how long ago the plaque had been installed went unanswered.

Former Stamford Parks and Recreation Committee member police Capt. **Thomas Lombardo** said he believed that the plaque had been erected before he first took a seat on the committee in 1999.

City **Parks Superintendent Laurie Albano** said she didn't know either, as did former Parks Superintendent Mickey Docimo.

Albano said within the last year the plaque, which she valued at about \$5,500, had been moved to a more visible location.

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"It is ironic that for years it was just kind of tucked away in a grove of trees off the right field foul line," Albano said. "And here we move it to a more prominent location with brand new benches and surrounded by new amenities and, unfortunately, it gets stolen."

Albano said she hopes that if someone brings it to a metal recycler it will be recognized as the historical artifact it is and the scrap-metal dealer will notify the city. She said she would look through her files in hopes of finding a picture of the plaque.

DiSpagna said that metal thefts are increasing all over the area.

"It's because bronze and copper prices are going up," he said. "There have been thefts of memorial plaques in public parks and cemeteries and those on private buildings are susceptible to being stolen."

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Scrap bronze is selling for about \$1.70 per pound -- making the plaque worth \$100 or less on the scrap market.

In another reported metal theft Thursday that does not appear to be related, a stainless steel fan hood for an industrial stove and a stainless steel serving cart were stolen from behind 19 Cedar Heights Road. DiSpagna said the hood and cart were being stored behind Michelina's Pizza when they were taken without permission.

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