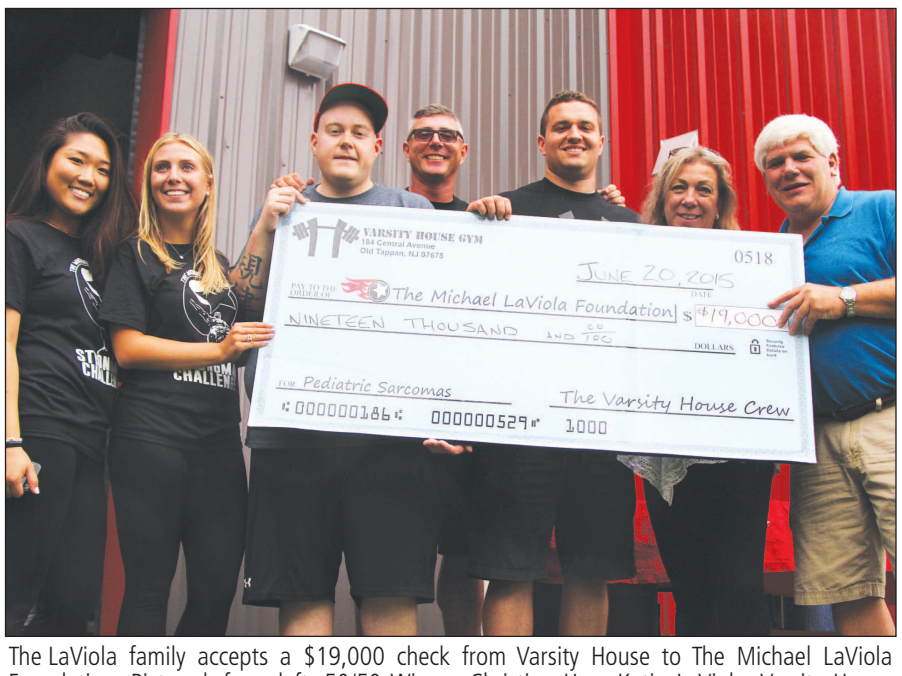
FEATS OF STRENGTH: Strongman Challenge raises funds

A contestant takes part in the Overhead Log Press at the seventh annual Strongman Challenge.

PHOTO BY MURRAY BASS



The LaViola family accepts a $19,000 check from Varsity House to The Michael LaViola Foundation. Pictured, from left: 50/50 Winner Christine Han, Katie LaViola, Varsity House General Manager Trevor Lang, Varsity House Owner Joe Riggio, Varsity House Owner Dan Goodman, Mary LaViola and Mike LaViola.

PHOTO COURTESY TREVOR LANG

Feel the burn!

PHOTO BY MURRAY BASS

NORTHERN VALLEY

Some of the area's strongest athletes came from all over to Orangeburg, N.Y. to flex, lift and, most importantly, raise funds for worthy causes at the seventh annual Strongman Challenge, organized by The Michael LaViola Foundation and hosted by Varsity House Gym.

Held every year, the event involves athletes performing feats of strength for the purpose of raising funds for two very worthwhile causes: cancer research and scholarships for local students.

Though the Strongman Challenge was a venue for participants to show off their physical strength, the event is held in memory of Michael LaViola, who showed true inner fortitude and mettle in the face of unimaginable adversity.

LaViola was just 21 years old when his life was cut tragically and prematurely short by a rare form of cancer called Sinovial Sarcoma in 2008. But even in his final days, he refused to quit – and that takes true strength.

"He never stopped hoping and living, and in his own words, he 'never, never, never' gave up," say the charity's founder, his family.

Thus, the Strongman Challenge was born – held in the memory of one of the strongest men Old Tappan will ever know.

Proceeds raised from this event go to two scholarships for graduating seniors at Northern Valley Old Tappan. One scholarship is given to a student who plans on pursuing a career in medicine, and another is given to a football player (LaViola played all four years of his high school career for the Golden Knights).

The remaining funds go to Dr. Melinda Merchant, now a cancer researcher at the National Institute of Health and the National Cancer Institute, who was LaViola's physician. In her work, she is dedicated entirely to finding a cure for Synovial Sarcoma and other sarcomas.

At the Strongman Challenge, participants were split into four groups: eighth and ninth graders, high schoolers, and college and professional athletes under and over 220 pounds. Events included the Overhead Log Press, the Death Medley (Farmers Walk and Sled Drag), the Tractor Tire Flip and the Prowler Pull. In addition, there were prizes and giveaways for all contestants, as well as a 50/50 raffle for all spectators.

In its first six years, the event had raised over $59,000. This year's event, held for the first time at Varsity House's new location in New York, raised $19,000. Great job and congratulations to all of the participants.

For more information about the foundation and the fight against pediatric sarcomas, visit www.MichaelLaViolaFoundation.org.

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