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Backus championship anniversary celebrated

A sell-out crowd honored Billy Backus during a banquet held at Barbagallo's Restaurant in East Syracuse on Dec. 2. The banquet was held on the eve of the 25th anniversary of Billy winning the World Welterweight Title at the Syracuse War Memorial. That night, 25 years ago, Backus defeated Jose Napoles for the World Welterweight Championship.

Ring 76 President Don Nodecker, serving as master of ceremonies and Hall of Fame Director Ed Brothy, introduced notable boxing personalities in the crowd associated with Backus's career. Among them were Manager Tony Graziano, Trainer Billy Harris, Ernie Emmi, who represented the Canastota Boxing Club and Backus's uncle and former welterweight and middleweight champion Carmen Basilio. Other boxing notables and politicians in attendance included Johnny DeJohn, Rocky Fratto, Dickie DiVeronica, NYS Assemblyman Bill Magee and Senator John DeFrancisco. Several letters of congratulations were shared.

"Backus's championship career was inspiring," said Bob Steele, an Everlast representative, as he presented Backus with a large gold anniversary glove. Basilio credited his nephew's career: "He was a dedicated fighter. I am proud of his championship fight and his entire career."

Brophy pointed out that "Backus chose one of the toughest sports there is and reached the mountain top. Very few men reached the peak before him and only few have since. He made a mark in history that will live long past this 25th anniversary

celebration." Nodecker presented a plaque to Backus and said, "He was a champion, both in and out of the ring ... a class act. Bill held the title when each division had just one champion and he beat one of the world's greatest fighters."

"Boxing has been good to me," Backus said during his acceptance speech. "I traveled the world, several times to Paris. I also fought in Berlin and halfway around the world in Australia." He shared his career highlights with the attentive crowd crediting the many people who supported him, including his manager Graziano and the members of the Canastota Boxing Club. Billy acknowledged his wife, Peggy, and their family for their support during his career that spanned from 1962 to his retirement in 1978.

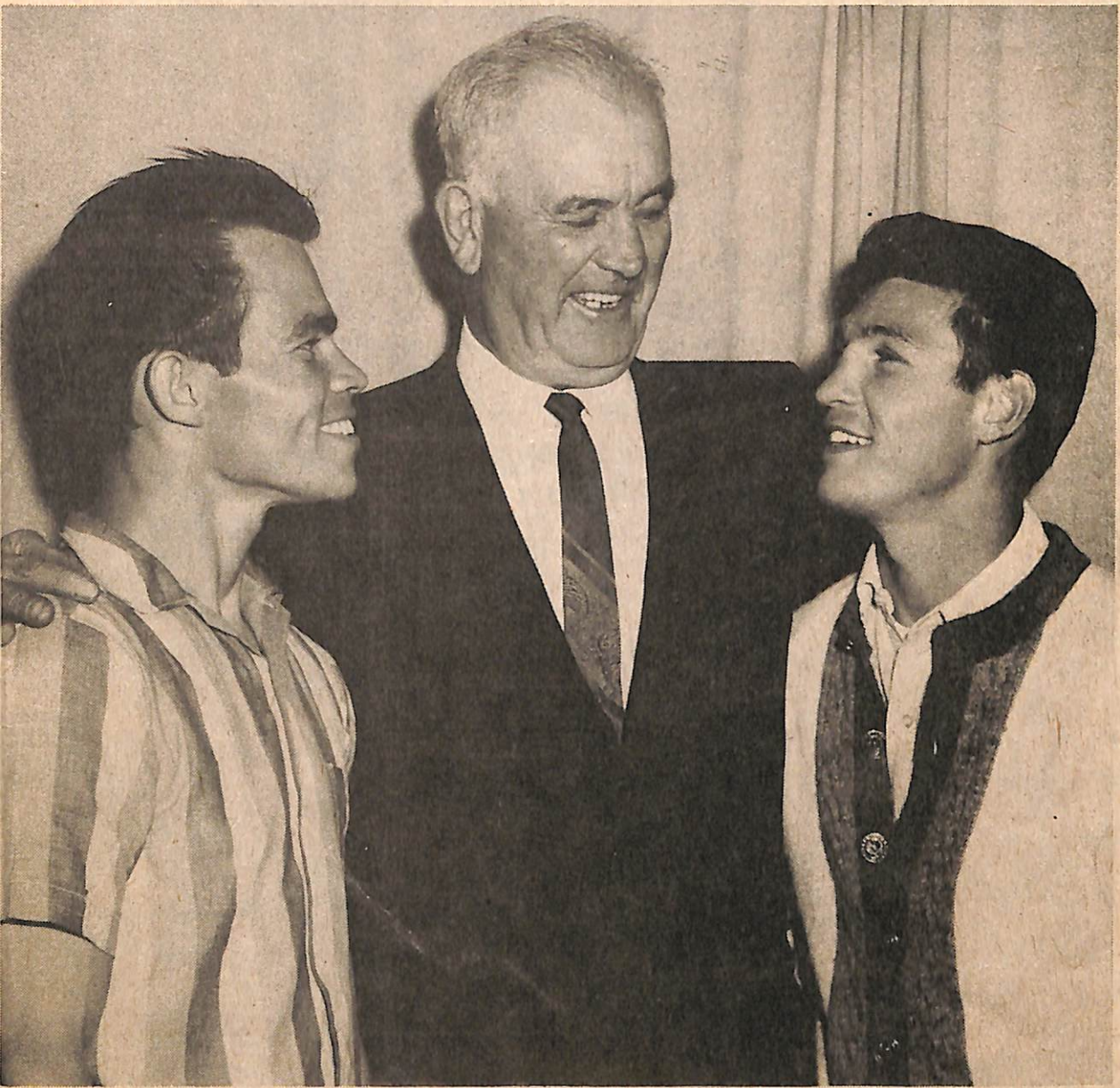
The evening celebration continued late into the night with dinner and dancing. Family and friends reminisced about a magical career and the championship fight 25 years ago, Dec. 3, 1970.

On Sunday, the actual anniversary date, an open house was held at the Boxing Hall of Fame Museum. A steady flow of fans, friends and family members dropped by to congratulate the champ. Backus signed autographs and posed for photos by his statue, championship belt and other boxing memorabilia.

Former Canastota Mayor Joe Paone presented a plaque to Backus on behalf of the Disabled Veterans and current Mayor Mark Lavonas presented a Proclamation declaring Dec. 3, 1995, Billy Backus Day in Canastota.



Canastota's own young Zack Barres stands with Billy Backus and holds the championship poster of 25 years ago at a 25th anniversary dinner honoring Backus.



Backus in his prime

A look back on the 25th anniversary of Billy Backus winning the World Welterweight Championship, found Backus, right, and boxer Hector Cortez, posing with former Heavyweight Campion Hal TNT Caro, at a boxing function held at the White Elephant.