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By Cary Shuman



Richard Fucillo (left), who was honored by the New England Patriots Charitable Foundation for his outstanding community service, is pictured with Winthrop Youth Football President Joe Ferrara at the Winthrop High Football Father's Day Pancake Breakfast Sunday.

Richard Fucillo, one of the founders of the Viking Pride Foundation, was honored as a 2006 New England Patriots Community MVP Award finalist at an awards luncheon last Thursday at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro.

Fucillo was one of 22 recipients across the six New England states. The award recognizes community volunteers “who demonstrate leadership, dedication, and a commitment to bettering the community in which they live.”

Robert Kraft, owner of the New England Patriots, and his wife, Myra, congratulated Fucillo and the other recipients on their outstanding contributions to their respective communities. A \$1,500 donation was made to the Viking Pride Foundation in Fucillo's name.

Al Petrilli and Chris Tsiotos, board members of the Viking Pride Foundation, nominated Fucillo for the award.

Fucillo, 43, is the chairman and founder of the Viking Pride Foundation, which he founded in 2004 response to the town's cutting of all the co-curricular activities, including sports programs, from the budget.

Through the efforts of Fucillo and foundation board members, the group has been able to raise approximately \$500,000 for co-curricular activities in the Winthrop schools.

“We're trying to create an endowment so that we don't have to continually raise money, and we can insure that co-curricular activities will remain for current and future generations of Winthrop students,” said Fucillo.

The foundation's achievements are numerous. The organization has been able to reduce user fees (WHS students are required to pay a fee to participate in a co-curricular activity) by a significant amount, from \$325 to \$200.

The foundation has also been able to fund 30 additional programs, helping such high school and middle school student groups as the Math Club and team, the Drama Society, the debate team, and engineering and robotics.

The foundation also launched a very successful Special Teacher Grant Program. Teachers can apply for grants for special programs they want to incorporate into their classrooms. Approximately \$25,000 in grants have been distributed to teachers in the past two years.

In an interview this week, Fucillo recalled the Viking Foundation's inception.

"Nick Tsiotos and I were in World Gym one day and we were very upset and distraught about the elimination of the co-curricular activities in the Winthrop schools," said Fucillo. "We felt that the children in Winthrop deserved at least what we had, so we brainstormed and came up with the idea for the Viking Pride Foundation."

Fucillo said he called about 30 people, and their response was, "What can I do to help you?" These were community leaders, business leaders, educators, and alumni," said Fucillo. "The Viking Pride Foundation took off from there."

Fucillo is happy about the impact that the foundation has had in the town.

"We funded some programs but we were able to change the attitude in the town," said Fucillo. "We went from an attitude of complete despair and disgust to an attitude of optimism, that things are OK here and we're going to be OK. In addition to the money, I think we were able to change the attitude of the community toward the kids, and I think that's continuing. I think things are continually getting better."

Richard Fucillo was a football, basketball, and baseball player at Winthrop High School who graduated in 1980. He played football at Springfield College and is currently an assistant coach of the Winthrop High football team. He is the vice president of the Northeast Division of Axa Advisors.

Fucillo and his wife, Kathleen, who is also a Winthrop High School graduate, have three children, Anna, 9, Rich Jr., 7, and Sarah, 3.