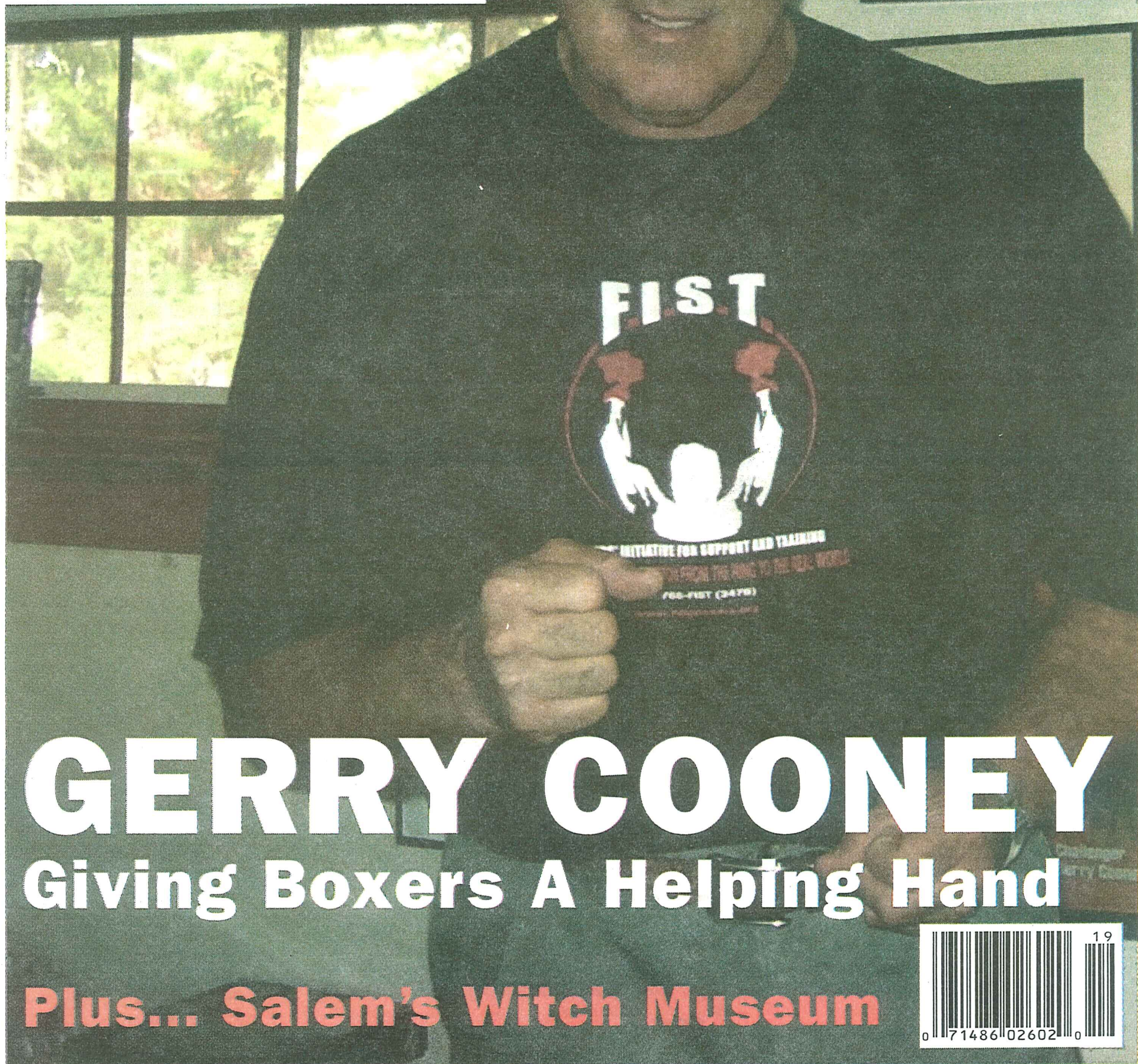


THE Irish EXAMINER

America's Leading Irish Newspaper

Wednesday May 10th-Tuesday May 16th. 2006

\$1.00 NY, NJ, CT, MA / \$1.50 Elsewhere in USA / \$2.25 Canada



GERRY COONEY

Giving Boxers A Helping Hand

Plus... Salem's Witch Museum



Gerry Cooney's F.I.S.T. Gives Former Boxers A Helping Hand

By John Mooney

Irish American boxer Gerry Cooney amassed a 55-3 amateur record that included a Golden Gloves championship on St. Patrick's Day (March 17), 1972. The 6' 7" heavyweight from Long Island went pro and used his devastating left hooks to knock out top contenders. In 1981, when he KO'd Ken Norton in the first round at Madison Square Garden, Cooney became the Number 1 challenger to take on undefeated champion Larry Holmes. At its time, Holmes-Cooney was the richest title fight ever, thanks, in part, to the marketing of Cooney as "The Great White Hope." The bout earned him close to \$10 million.

The hard punching Cooney lost to Holmes by TKO in the 13th round. Ensuing depres-

sion, injuries, and personal problems took their toll, and Cooney was never the same again. A series of comebacks ended in 1990 when he lost in

watched how the other one spent his money.

Fighters - from world champions to average Joes - often wind up broke when their

apart, Cooney founded F.I.S.T. (Fighters' Initiative for Support and Training) in 1998.

"Most boxers don't plan for their retirement, and promot-

"Most boxers don't plan for their retirement, and promoters take advantage by offering 'one last payday.' Their bodies can no longer match their will, and unfortunately, the results can be disastrous."

two rounds to George Foreman.

Fortunately, the Huntington, NY native did not blow his substantial earnings. He jokingly attributes his financial security to having two managers who hated each other and who

careers end. Despite being the oldest professional sport in the U.S., boxing has no players association. They do not receive pensions, health insurance, or workman's compensation. After talking with many former boxers whose lives had fallen

ers take advantage by offering 'one last payday.' Their bodies can no longer match their will, and unfortunately, the results can be disastrous," said the soft-spoken Cooney, who now lives in New Jersey with his wife Jennifer and their two children,

Jackson (8) and Sarah (5). He also has an older son, Christopher (17).

"Fighters without other skills will stay in the sport too long. They take jobs as sparring partners and suffer devastating injuries against opponents who would have never touched them years earlier," Cooney added. "These are hard working guys who get up at 4:30 in the morning to train. They just need a chance. F.I.S.T. helps them transition to a life outside the ring."

The organization offers medical and neurological exams, psychological and legal counseling, rehabilitation from addictions, mentoring, job training and placement. Nearly 400 fighters have found jobs or received assistance with food and housing. F.I.S.T. has helped journeymen and former heavyweight champion Carl "The Truth" Williams, who now works for a security firm in Manhattan.

Cooney, who ranked #53 on Ring Magazine's list of the 100 greatest punchers of all-time, has become good friends with Larry Holmes over the years. In fact, the former champ comes to many F.I.S.T. events. Other supporters include ring announcer Michael Buffer, as well as the legendary champions Jake LaMotta ("The Raging Bull") and Smokin' Joe Frazier, who will both attend a Texas Hold'Em poker fund raiser tonight for F.I.S.T. in Battery Park.

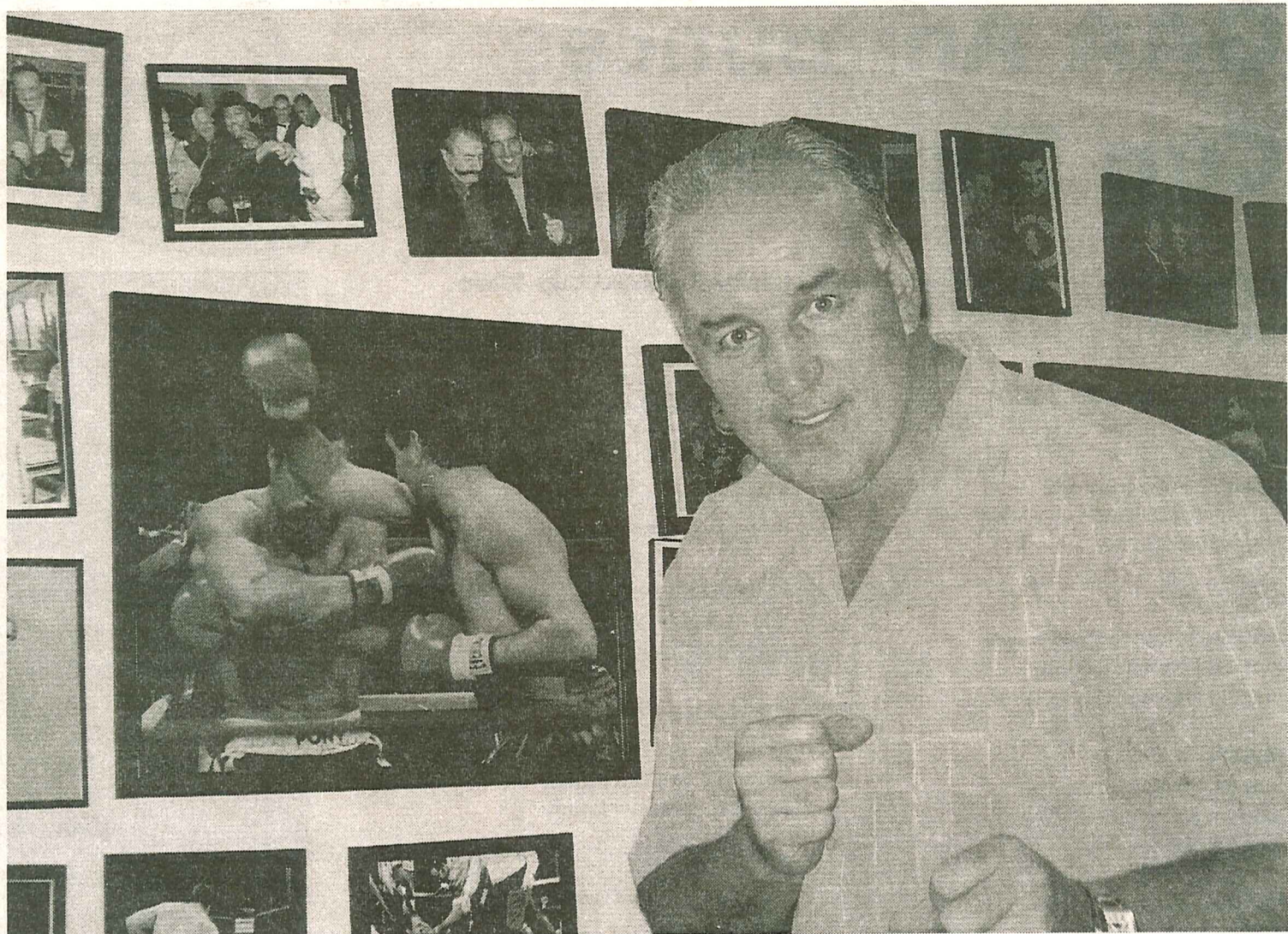
"Gerry is so committed because he knows how desperately a program like this is needed," said F.I.S.T.'s case manager Mike Smith, a certified rehabilitation counselor. "Fighters will tell you they need a job, but they have other issues that might be preventing them from securing work: health problems, addictions, legal and family issues."

Pride and skepticism are among the organization's



FIST's Gerry Cooney

The Texas Hold'Em fund raiser to benefit the F.I.S.T. organization takes place on Weds, May 10 from 6:30 to 11:30 p.m. at Battery Gardens (inside Battery Park across from 17 State St.). If you are interested in attending and playing poker with Gerry Cooney, Joe Frazier, Jake LaMotta, Rod Gilbert, and other New York sports greats, contact F.I.S.T. at (212) 675-4133 or visit www.FIST.org. Upcoming events include celebrity golf tournaments and cigar nights.



Long Island native Gerry Cooney has helped more than 400 boxers develop marketable job skills and overcome problems ranging from alcohol and drug addictions to legal issues

biggest challenges. Some boxers assume that it's another attempt to take advantage of them. Just as in the ring, they keep their guard up. As a former fighter, Cooney has the credibility to overcome such apprehension. Many clients have said they wished that they had contacted F.I.S.T. sooner.

Fighters who squandered their sizable earnings - Mike Tyson, for example - are well known, yet only one percent of professional boxers ever make big money. The majority of F.I.S.T.'s clients are middle-of-the-road fighters in their 30s, although there are a few former champions and top contenders.

Job placements range from security to hair dressing. F.I.S.T. provides training in trades such as carpentry and commercial truck driving. Jean-Robert Semes, who had a record of 4-8 and sparred with Hector "Macho" Camacho, has become quite successful in real

estate.

"I didn't see a future in the fight business. I trained for matches that were postponed

"F.I.S.T. paid for my real estate training courses when I lost my job after 9/11."

Cooney also enlists the sup-

Marty Lyons and Glenn Foley. The gentle giant has also assembled an impressive board that includes neurosurgeons,

es, and a tailor who donates clothing for candidates to look more professional on interviews.

F.I.S.T. hosts numerous fund-raisers, including cigar nights, boxing events, and golf tournaments. Joe Sano, president of F.I.S.T.'s Board of Directors, hopes to increase corporate support. Both he and Cooney would like more involvement from promoters such as Don King and Bob Arum, who make the lion's share of money in boxing but have yet to contribute in a substantial way. ☺

"I didn't see a future in the fight business. I trained for matches that were postponed and later rescheduled when I wasn't in top shape."

and later rescheduled when I wasn't in top shape," said Semes, works on large deals for Tyger Realty in Manhattan.

port of athletes from other sports, including NHL Hall-of-Famer Rod Gilbert from the NY Rangers and former NY Jets

psychiatrists, lawyers, and HBO executives. Resources include a sports psychologist, a dentist who provides free dental servic-

The Examiner Puzzle Solutions

Solution to this Week's Crossword

C	A	B		C	A	C	O		T	O	L	A
C	P	A		H	S	I	A		O	L	E	A
A	A	L		A	S	A	F	E	T	I	D	A
			D	A	N	E			L	E	D	A
E	R	N	S	T		P	R	A	M			
L	U	E	S		L	O	U	T		P	L	O
M	R	S		R	A	S	S	E		L	E	G
O	U	S		I	D	E	A		T	A	U	R
			A	C	E	R		D	A	N	C	E
	C	A	R	E				H	A	R	T	
G	U	M	A	R	A	B	I	C		P	E	A
E	R	I	C		B	A	R	I		O	R	B
O	D	E	A		U	R	E	A		D	A	B

Solution to this Week's Easy Su Doku Puzzle

8	7	2	9	4	5	3	1	6
4	6	5	2	1	3	7	8	9
3	1	9	8	7	6	4	2	5
6	8	7	3	2	4	9	5	1
2	9	3	6	5	1	8	7	4
5	4	1	7	8	9	6	3	2
9	3	8	5	6	2	1	4	7
7	5	4	1	9	8	2	6	3
1	2	6	4	3	7	5	9	8

Solution to this Week's Medium Su Doku Puzzle

6	5	3	8	7	1	2	4	9
7	8	2	4	9	5	6	1	3
9	4	1	2	6	3	8	7	5
1	2	8	5	4	7	9	3	6
3	6	4	1	8	9	5	2	7
5	9	7	6	3	2	4	8	1
8	7	9	3	5	4	1	6	2
2	3	6	9	1	8	7	5	4
4	1	5	7	2	6	3	9	8