

I.F. Person of the Year 2011

Mr. Vinnie Torre

By: Lynn Earing



SKYTALK 2012



When Vinnie became president of the Lyndhurst Club, over a decade ago, it was a small but successful club. Their claim to fame was the YB LCM Band Race and the OB 600 Mile 3 Bird Derby. Vinnie became the engine that propelled the Lyndhurst Club to become the fastest growing and most successful club in the state. Our LCM Band Race is “the biggest and best in New Jersey.” This year we sold to over 160 lofts and had 119 lofts in the LCM Race. Vinnie Torre has foresight. He is always questioning, “What can we do to make the LCM Race better?” I often call him P.T. Barnum. When our usual shipping night site was unavailable this year, we had to rent a smaller hall with no room for food. What did Vinnie think of? “Let’s get a stand like at a feast, set it up in the parking lot and serve sausage sandwiches and hot dogs.” Well, it was a success! Just a few weeks ago our treasurer and the IF Vice President, Jim Walker, told Vinnie the Elk’s, our usual shipping site, was asking their members for donations to help defray the costs to repair their club after Hurricane Irene. Vinnie, without even thinking about it said to him, “Send them a check.”

Some disgruntled people say Vinnie Torre is loud and insulting at times. He has his critics but he expects every flyer to do his share at the club,

especially on shipping night. Sometimes I hear him yelling at someone to get over here and put dots on the counting sheets. Vinnie believes all the members need to participate and do their share. No member gets paid at the Lyndhurst Club. It’s not a business. It’s a club with members. No one intimidates Vinnie Torre. Vinnie doesn’t care who thinks what about him because he is only for the pigeon game and the club. No one gets paid at the Lyndhurst Club for anything. It is all done by members. The club has had a new floor installed this past year by club members. Someone plows the parking lot when it snows. Someone else shovels the snow and cuts the grass. It seems that Vinnie says something needs to be done and someone is there to do it.

Vinnie himself works tirelessly for the club. I can’t tell you how many hours he puts in for the good of the club and how many phone calls he makes to flyers to support us. Vinnie himself believes that by shipping other clubs’ races and supporting them they will in return support us. He ships a lot of specials and this has paid off for our club. Our club has purchased new computers, shipping stations and two large screen TV’s so that buyers at our auctions can view internet bids and see results of races as they are being inputted.

Vinnie loves a good party and our club has barbecues in the warm weather and get-togethers in the cold weather. We have our trophy night in February and our LCM Auction in March. At our parties, he wants the members to bring their wives and kids. He believes that involving the family and especially the wives is key to a successful club. Everyone is welcome and we’ve had some great times. When our member, Tony Sousa, started bringing his son to our monthly meetings (Bryan was about 4 yrs old then)

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Vinnie sat him on the table next to him and gave him the gavel. He would tell Bryan when to bang it. Little Bryan sat on that table for many meetings waiting for the signal. Bryan loved to help around the club and we would joke that he would someday be president. One year we gave him a trophy on trophy night engraved, "To the future president of the Lyndhurst Homing Pigeon Club." Bryan still has the trophy and he's still coming to the club helping out. He is now 11 years old.

Vinnie is also president of the Hudson County Homing Pigeon Club. This club has been inactive for many years but the clubhouse is still in Hoboken. That club was famous for its 1-Bird Derby. A few years ago, Vinnie decided to start that race up again and any profit would go to a worthy cause. Vinnie and I have been involved with the Hoboken Historical Museum. We have conducted talks and pigeon releases for the 3rd and 4th grade classes from the local schools. We have the kids write a secret note and then we attach it to a pigeon's band. When we go back to the loft, we take it off the pigeon and mail it back to the class. The kids love it and it really gives them an idea as to how homing pigeons have been utilized in history.

This museum has benefited from the profits of the 1-Bird Derby. The museum publishes a small booklet maybe once a year. It is about places and things in Hoboken, some past and gone and some still here. "The Pigeons Guys, A Chapbook from the Vanishing Hoboken Series" was published in 2010 about Vinnie's recollections of the sport in Hoboken. Every Saturday there is a tour of Hoboken. After the tour stops at Fiore's for a taste of homemade mozzarella cheese, they swing around the corner and stop across the street from the loft. Vinnie chuckles at this. If we're on the roof waiting for birds, he always waves. I think he's amazed that he's a stop on the tour.

Sometime late in 2004, Jim Walker approached Vinnie about a family he knew whose daughter had cancer. Erin Smith was first diagnosed at 4 yrs old. She was treated and then went into remission. A few years later, the cancer returned and she was again in treatment. Jim asked Vinnie, "Is there something the club could do to raise some money for this financially strapped family due to overwhelming medical costs?" Vinnie didn't blink an eye and a pigeon auction was the answer to raising some money. No one ever thought it would be so successful. The plan went into action. Vinnie said, "I'm calling the best flyers I know and asking them to send us a pigeon for this auction."



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The night of the auction, in January 2005, Erin's father was at the club. Now, not being a pigeon flyer and not knowing what was about to happen, the first bird was auctioned off and brought in close to \$3,000.00. Erin's father was, to say the least, flabbergasted. By the end of the night over \$27,000.00 was raised. And we thought P.T. Barnum was a great promoter!!!!!! Afterwards, Johnny "Crown" Baginski, wrote an article about the auction in the Pigeon Digest Magazine. More money started arriving from not only across the country but even Europe. I think the final tally was about \$35,000.00. A few weeks later, Erin and her family visited the club and we were all able to meet this remarkable young girl. Unfortunately, later that year Erin lost her battle with the cancer and died. Her picture hangs in the club.

ANIMAL PLANET and "TAKING ON TYSON"
As news got out that there was a show in the works with Mike Tyson and homing pigeons, PETA started making waves. They were all over the news medias voicing their objections. Flyers and clubs started to get concerned. many that were on-board to participate in the filming started to bail out. Vinnie never waived in his belief that this undertaking was going to be a great plus for the pigeon sport. He was in contact with the IF (Richie Smith and others) who were in agreement with him. I was concerned myself but Vinnie wouldn't listen to any negativity. He believed in this and let me tell you, "Never ever tell Vinnie Torre he can't; because he will!!!!" I think Vinnie and Mike Tyson were a great match, with Vinnie as his coach. They could relate to each other. They both had been kids who grew up in the streets. Vinnie often says he terrorized Hoboken as a kid. They really enjoyed each other. Vinnie loved doing the show. It was a highlight in his life.

We filmed, the show aired and PETA fell silent. The show was well received around the world. Because of the show there were new flyers signing up to fly homers. Our club and Vinnie received many phone calls and e-mails from around the world applauding "Taking on Tyson." I think anyone that was involved had a great time. college student and had his own little business sharing a space in his father's mechanics shop. Helder Rodrigues became a member of Lyndhurst Club and needed a loft. He wanted to

keep the pigeons by the shop but needed to have them inside when the shop was closed. Vinnie told him," We'll build you a loft like Lynne's (4 by 4) and put it on wheels." Helder could roll the loft outside when needed. Vinnie constructed the loft in his garage, in sections, and they moved it to the shop in North Arlington. Helder has been flying for a few years out of that loft and he was one of the main characters on "Taking on Tyson." Vinnie has become his mentor.

This past winter on Lyndhurst Trophy Night, the club presented Vinnie with a plaque which read:

In Recognition of over a decade of Dedication,
Leadership and Commitment to the Spirit and
Vision of the Lyndhurst Homing Pigeon Club

Vincent Torre
Hillside Loft

"A legend in his own time"

February 5, 2011

Yes, Vinnie is loud. But as he says, "I was the youngest of 11 children and if you weren't loud at the dinner table you didn't eat."

Vinnie loves to go to the club on Wednesday nights, have some wine, and kibitz with the guys. He has a big booming laugh and people love to be around him. He may get angry about something, but he never stays mad.

When I first met him he told me, "I do pigeons!" Little did I imagine how the sport of pigeon flying would be such a huge part of our lives. We have great fun. •

