

NORTHERN VALLEY

## Strongman Challenge lifts competitive spirits

Last Saturday, on June 18, the Michael LaViola Foundation and Varsity House Gym hosted the eighth annual Strongman Challenge, a fundraising event that draws many of the area's strongest competitors.

Held every year, the event features athletes performing feats of strength for the purpose of raising funds for two very worthwhile causes: cancer research and schol-

arships 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 he succumbed to 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 founders, his family.

Proceeds raised from this event go to two scholarships for graduating seniors at Northern Valley Old Tappan. One scholar-



The overhead log press.

ship is given to a student who plans on pursuing a career in medicine, and another is given to a football player (LaViola played for Old Tappan’s Golden Knights all four years of high school).

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 three groups: eighth and ninth graders, high schoolers, and college and professional athletes. Events included the Overhead Log Press, the Death Medley (the tire flip and farmer’s walk) and a Max Distance Sandbag Carry. In addition, there were prizes and giveaways for all contestants, as well as a

50/50 raffle for all spectators.

In its first seven years, the event had raised over \$78,000. This year’s event raised another



Check out his strength!

\$18,000, bringing the eight-year total to \$96,000 of funding for scholarships and cancer research.

For more information about the foundation and the fight against pediatric sarcomas, visit [michaellaviolafoundation.org](http://michaellaviolafoundation.org).

Photos by Murray Bass



Pictured with the check are (from left) Joe Riggio of Varsity House; Mike, Mary and Kate LaViola; and Dan Goodman of Varsity House.



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A competitor flips a 600-pound tire at the Strongman Challenge.