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Unsung Hero: Richard Fernandez, Retired NYPD Sergeant and Community Volunteer

By rctadmin on October 11, 2018 0 Comments

Richard Fernandez is a retired NYPD Sergeant, who has had a positive impact on the quality of life in North Rockland and throughout the county by his dedicated work as a volunteer for many nonprofit organizations.

By Barry Warner

A history of volunteerism has demonstrated Richard Fernandez's commitment to his community and willingness to work for the betterment of others. Despite being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis 20 years ago, Fernandez has never stopped volunteering for his community and has inspired most who come in contact with him as a result. He is this week's Unsung Hero.

Describing his history as a first responder and volunteer, Fernandez said, "I worked as a sergeant in the New York Police Department for nineteen years and retired in 2013. I desired to enforce the laws and help people in need. I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, a progressive disease, twenty years ago. I had difficulty walking, may have been blinded and I have been wheelchair-bound. At times, I struggled cognitively and even when I was fatigued, I kept myself going! I was the solo recipient of the 1998 Theodore Roosevelt Association Police Award bestowed on a uniformed member of the service, who like Theodore Roosevelt had overcome serious physical challenges to continue admirable service," Fernandez told the Rockland County Times.

He also has served his fellow workers as a union delegate. He said, "I counseled members about health resources that they may not have been aware of. I volunteered to serve as a member of the Disability Advisory Council to advise the Rockland County Legislators and County Executive about issues that concern the disabled. I was elected to serve as Board of Education Vice-President of the North Rockland Central School District. In that capacity, I help to establish district policies, vote on personnel matters and act as a communication link to the community."

Fernandez continued, "I am a volunteer coordinator for the Rockland County Police Hispanic Society and served as Secretary for eleven years. I can't walk long distances, but I use a scooter to get around. From 1998 to the present, I have been the volunteer coordinator and obtained major sponsors for the Annual Turkey Trot Five Mile Race at Rockland Lake. In 2017, the race helped raise over \$119,500 for the pediatric cancer Marisa Fund and other local charities including, but not limited to, the People to People food pantry, Salvation Army, two scholarship funds and the Ambulance Corps. I am a member of the North Rockland Day Race organizing committee. This three mile charity race raises funds for local families experiencing serious medical hardships. Three benefactors each

received \$10,000 from the 2018 race. I volunteer to be part of solutions at the micro-level and while I can't solve the larger problems, at least I can have a small impact."

Additional volunteer community services performed by Richard Fernandez included: coat, food and school supply drives; Rockland Road Runner Activities Chairperson 2014-2016 where he earned the 2014 George Wodicka Inspiration Award presented to a club member who best exemplifies the qualities that inspire and motivate others to keep running and persevere against all odds; a Rockland Baptist Church- Men's Ministry Leader plus a Youth Athletic Coach for basketball and baseball.

Friend Michael Greco said, "Despite the Multiple Sclerosis significantly advancing to a stage severely affecting his mobility, Rich continues to dedicate his time to giving back. His passion and dedication to serving others is truly an inspiration to those who know him and know of his remarkable and unselfish accomplishments. Richard Fernandez is a true 'man of service' who never looks to the spotlight or expects anything in return."

Another friend Pablo Ramos said, "Rich is a retired NYPD Sergeant who has had an amazing impact on the quality of life in North Rockland and throughout the county through his professional and dedicated work. He tirelessly lends his time and talent to many other nonprofit organizations, scholarship awards programs and community programs that seek to enrich the quality of life for all of Rockland's residents."

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a long-lasting disease that can affect the brain, spinal cord and the optic nerves in the eyes. It can cause problems with vision, balance, muscle control and other basic body functions. The effects are often different for everyone who has the disease. Some people have mild symptoms and don't need treatment, while others will have trouble getting around and doing daily tasks.

MS happens when the immune system attacks a fatty material called myelin, which wraps around the nerve fibers to protect them. Without this outer shell, the nerves become damaged and scar tissue may form. The damage means that the brain can't send signals through the body correctly. As a result, a person may have symptoms such as: trouble walking, feeling tired, muscle weakness or spasms, blurred or double vision plus numbness and tingling.

The Rockland Road Runners' 5 Mile Turkey Trot for the Marisa Fund at Rockland Lake Park has become the largest event in Rockland County, drawing over 3,100 participants from the New York Metro area and beyond. 2018 will be the 27th Annual Run on Thanksgiving Day, November 22nd and the money raised will support the efforts of the Marisa Fund to eradicate childhood cancer.

For additional information visit www.nationalmssociety.org and <https://marisafund.org>