

Website Cavanaugh Event Article

The weather in Deptford, New Jersey was cold on Saturday, January 17, yet the respect and admiration inside the Adelphia Restaurant easily warmed everyone attending the special event. The Old Baldy Civil War Round Table held a luncheon to honor their co-founder Mr. Michael A. Cavanaugh. Compliments and accolades for Mr. Cavanaugh rained down from every corner of the room. In listening to those heartfelt tributes one had to be humbled to be in Mike's presence. The officers, board of directors, and the membership of Old Baldy - now in its thirty-eighth year - were profoundly pleased to organize and oversee the four-hour event. Over seventy-five people from the Civil War community, as well as Mike's family and friends, came out to celebrate and applaud Mike for his well-known legacy.

Bob Russo, Old Baldy's vice president, acted as the master of ceremonies. Opening the event, Bob thanked Mike for his years of service in keeping alive the sacrifice and memory of those who lived in the Civil War era. He praised the guest of honor for holding true to Abraham Lincoln's words to, ". . . never forget what they did here." Mike certainly did his share to tell the story of the war, its combatants and citizens.

Mr. Bruce Sirak, a co-founder and President of Camp Olden Civil War Round Table, presented a heartfelt Benediction, asking, God's blessing on Mike, his family and all those in attendance. Bruce remembered those serving today asking God's blessing, ". . . upon those men and women who have come forth at the call of their country, to serve in the armed forces of the United States, to protect and defend its people and promote peace throughout the world." With great dignity Bruce prayed, "Send down your blessing in generous measure upon Michael Cavanaugh whom we honor this afternoon. We thank him for the many years he has dedicated to keeping alive the memory of the brave men who fought and died in the Civil War."

Steve Wright, former Old Baldy president and longtime friend of Mike said, "A real benefit to having Mike with Old Baldy was that he seemed to know virtually everyone in the Civil War community. Mike's legacy of Civil War education and preservation will extend far beyond Old Baldy Civil War Round Table. The entire Delaware Valley has benefited from his years of hard work and dedication and we are all better for it." Speaking genuinely, Steve added, "I'm proud and honored to call Mike Cavanaugh my friend and mentor. I'm a much better person for having known him."

Mr. Cavanaugh stepped up to speak to an audience very eager to see and hear his remarks and he did not disappoint in saying, "My sincere thanks for the honor you placed upon me at this afternoon's luncheon. It is great to see so many old friends, some that I haven't seen in years. The Old Baldy Civil War Round Table has been around for 38 years. I have been a member for those 38 years and have seen it all – good and bad – but, thankfully, mostly good. I am delighted that we are now again growing. It appears that every time we are about to fold, the membership steps up and saves Old Baldy. It has happened several times with Steve Wright taking charge as president and the last time with Rich Jankowski and our members from New Jersey. Bob Russo told me that 'Rich Jankowski was not going to let the Old Baldy Civil War Round table die on his watch!' I approved of the move to New Jersey and was especially delighted that we kept the Old Baldy name."

Mike recalled the past in stating, "I often think back to January 1977 and the first meeting at the Civil War Library and Museum on Pine Street. Only six or seven attended but we were the only Civil War Round Table in the Delaware Valley at that time. As we grew we were able to draw history buffs who were looking for a place to meet and study the Civil War. They soon became our new members. Nationally known historians presented informative and interesting programs and National Park Service guides took us on tours to almost all the Civil War battlefields on the East coast."

Remembering past accomplishments Mike recalled, "Three of our most important successes; saving the Hancock Tomb; erecting a statue of General John Gibbon at Gettysburg; and keeping the doors of the Civil War Library and Museum open with dedicated volunteers, special programs and fund raising events. There were many other worthwhile preservation projects we supported and participated in. Hopefully we can continue that tradition."

In looking ahead Mike declared, "I am looking forward to the future and our 40th anniversary in January 2017. Although I am unable to attend regular meetings, I promise to do my part when I can in helping Old Baldy grow. Be sure to include me in your emails. I want to help!"

Mike's good friend Ed Root from the Civil War Round Table of Eastern Pennsylvania read a letter from Dr. Richard Sommers of Carlisle, Pennsylvania saying, "Your leadership of the Old Baldy and Eastern Pennsylvania Round Tables makes clear your willingness to share your love for the Civil War with our fellow Civil Warriors." Mike was further described as a, ". . . fine fellow: hale and hearty **buff**, good-natured, as likable as an Irish coal miner/lieutenant of Philadelphia police detectives can be!"

Reading a letter from Mike's friend, author and historian Wil Greene, Mr. Root said, "Your contribution to the Civil War Book Exchange, scholarship in your publications, and to the greater Philadelphia history community marks you as one of the best of our "avocational" historians."

In speaking for himself Mr. Root said, "Mike is known throughout the Civil War community as a scholar, mentor and simply a wonderful human being." Ed added the event was, "to honor one of the good guys, Mike Cavanaugh." The Eastern Pennsylvania Round Table along with the Delaware Valley Civil War Round Table filled tables at the event to show support, respect and admiration for Mike.

Mr. William Holdsworth, also a longtime Old Baldy member and friend, read a letter from decorated United States Marine Corps, Vietnam Veteran, and National Park Service Historian at Antietam, Mr. Ted Alexander. Ted thanked Mike for his, "scholarship, his books, his dedication to battlefield preservation," and his, "creation of what has become the nationally known *Civil War News*." Ted accurately closed with "This tribute event is very much deserved. Thank you for being my friend and thank you for all that you do to preserve our American

Heritage.” Mr. Holdsworth remembered being very impressed, “with the knowledge shone by Mike and other Old Baldy members when he attended his first meeting,” and closed adding his, “great respect for Mike as a historian, researcher and friend.” A multitude of people throughout the day echoed the word, “friend,” in talking about Mike Cavanaugh.

Mrs. Deborah Holdsworth thought she was simply accompanying her husband to the event to honor Mike. She was pleasantly surprised when Old Baldy President, Mr. Rich Jankowski along with Mr. Wright and Mr. Cavanaugh, summoned her to the podium. Mrs. Holdsworth was honored for over twenty-two years of service in making the wreath that is set each Memorial Day at General Winfield Scott Hancock’s tomb at Montgomery Cemetery in West Norriton, Pennsylvania. Her work was recognized with a beautiful plaque and a certificate that read, “. . . the members of this Round Table, past, present and future are gratefully thankful. Her yearly efforts are an inspiration to others to do more in honoring our fallen heroes, preserving our heritage, and promoting education about the American Civil War.” Deborah’s dedicated work in constructing the wreath over the years is always beautifully done with a professional, patriotic, and dignified look.

Mr. Jankowski also paid tribute to Mr. Hal Jespersen, Old Baldy’s Webmaster. Rich provided a certificate noting Hal’s contribution, “For his continued outstanding service in promptly updating, correcting and posting current information . . . and making improvements to our exceptional website, the members, followers, guests and supporters of this Round Table are gratefully thankful.”

With the day’s activity moving along at a brisk pace, Mr. Jim Heenehan, a member of Old Baldy for over 15 years and an attorney for the United States Environmental Protection Agency since 1978, installed the recently elected officers and Board of Directors of Old Baldy Civil War Round Table. The returning officers are President, Mr. Rich Jankowski, Vice President, Mr. Bob Russo, Secretary, Mr. Bill Hughes, and Treasurer, Mr. Herb Kaufman. Also sworn in was the returning at-large member of the Board of Directors, Mr. Harry Jenkins, and new board members Mr. Frank Barletta and Mrs. Kathy Clark.

Guests were then served a nice lunch and in a salute to Mike Cavanaugh, Guinness was available at the bar. Before and after lunch, raffle tickets were drawn and the winners had over fifty door and raffle prizes which included books, videos, maps and prints to choose from. It should be mentioned that along with honoring Mike, all proceeds from the luncheon will be used to support historic preservation.

After lunch, Temple University professor Dr. Andy Waskie, well known portrayer of General George Gordon Meade, introduced the guest speaker, Dr. Randall Miller, Professor of History at Saint Joseph’s University. Dr. Miller is also a long time member of Old Baldy. He spoke poignantly and passionately on his topic, “Armed For Freedom: Black Soldiers and Emancipation.” Dr. Miller painted a vivid picture of the journey, plight and contribution of African American troops to the war effort and its outcome.

The afternoon came to a close when Bob Russo summoned the final speaker, President Rich Jankowski to the podium by stating, "Rich is the measuring stick for work effort and work ethic for any volunteer group and we are hard pressed to ever measure up to his standard." Mr. Jankowski graciously thanked the guest of honor and everyone in attendance for acknowledging Mike for his years of service and added, "It's an honor to follow in Mike's footsteps and to keep Old Baldy going." Rich closed the event by announcing Old Baldy has formed a committee to establish the Michael A. Cavanaugh Children's Book Award. The Committee members are Mr. Steve Wright, Mrs. Irene Wright and Ms. Gerri Hughes. In the near future additional details will come on this exciting endeavor that will allow the Round Table to keep the name Michael Cavanaugh at the forefront where it belongs.

The event could not have happened without the dedication, commitment and hard work of numerous Old Baldy members who did the organization proud with the outcome! Rosemary Viggiano started the ball rolling with a tremendous fact-finding and facility evaluation. Ed Komczyk and Bill Sia followed up by nailing down the facility arrangements and requirements. Pride in carrying out responsibilities became contagious with Don Wiles and Harry Jenkins working on the event program and the event slide presentation that was done by Dave Trout along with Bill Hughes who gathered many old photos. Bob Russo handled mail order ticket sales and Herb Kaufman oversaw the finances for the event. Don Forsyth, researched, reviewed and evaluated numerous speakers, narrowing the group down to two before a final decision was made. Our welcome ladies, Arlene Schnaare and Priscilla Gabosh, greeted arriving guest with a contagious smile. Herb Kaufman, Frank Barletta and the guest of honor, Mike Cavanaugh, donated raffle prizes. Rosemary Viggiano, Rich Jankowski, Herb Kaufman and Bob Russo also sold raffle tickets before and during the event. Walt Lafty provided some great video with only a few seconds notice. The Round Table is grateful to the numerous members who donated books and other materials for the door prizes. Through the entire process Rich Jankowski oversaw coordination efforts and jumped in to help wherever and whenever something was needed. That included the travel of a few hundred miles selling tickets at other round tables and events.

The event was well run, well attended, and was a well-deserved tribute to a true icon in the Civil War community. Mr. Cavanaugh has gone above and beyond in preserving the story and the memory of those who lived in the Civil War era. His work and passion has contributed immensely to other people's enjoyment of the study of the era and its people. Perhaps Rich Jankowski showed Mike the greatest respect when he worked so hard in recent years to keep Old Baldy active during difficult times. Through Rich's leadership, dedication, and commitment, along with an enthusiastic growing membership, Old Baldy continues to get stronger. The Round Table invites anyone with an interest to join us at a future meeting, held the second Thursday of each month at Camden County College in Blackwood, New Jersey. Check this website for future speakers and programs. The Old Baldy Civil War Round Table will celebrate its 40th Anniversary in January 2017. Please watch for details in the future. We hope to see you then and expect it will be as great as the event held to honor Mr. Michael Cavanaugh!