

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 163, No. 180

Serving Chicago's legal community for 162 years



Paul Langer, Chicago office managing partner of Quarles & Brady LLP, prepared to spar against Peter Birnbaum, president and CEO of the Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund, at Mercy Home's basement ring on Thursday. The two will face off on Oct. 14 at the 26th annual Ringside for Mercy's Sake charity event to benefit Mercy Home. For more photos — including of Langer and Birnbaum facing off in the ring — visit chicagolawbulletin.com. Photo by Rashel Gordin

Lawyers face off for Mercy Home

BY SARAH MANSUR
Law Bulletin correspondent

On Thursday afternoon, two Chicago lawyers exchanged blows — not in a courtroom, but in a boxing ring.

Peter J. Birnbaum and Paul L. Langer were trading punches and practicing for their upcoming match up at the 26th annual Ringside for Mercy's Sake charity event to benefit Mercy Home. The event will be held Oct. 14 at the Chicago Marriott Grand Ballroom on Michigan Avenue.

Mercy Home opened in 1887 on Chicago's Northwest Side for the city's homeless boys. In 1987,

County Cook lawyers prepare to slug it out in charity boxing match to help youth center

the organization opened a girls' shelter in the former Walgreen mansion on the South Side.

It's the third Ringside event for Langer, Chicago office managing partner at Quarles & Brady LLP, but the first for Birnbaum, president and CEO of the Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund.

Birnbaum said he started training seriously in March and has been sparring against opponents for the past month.

"I thought this is a great opportunity to get in shape and do something way out of my comfort zone," he said.

But he's realized in the course of training that smacking a punching bag is nothing like getting hit in the face.

"It wakes you up," Birnbaum said as he geared up during practice Thursday at Mercy Home's basement ring.

Former Mercy Home president

the Rev. Edward Kelly brought the Catholic Youth Organization's athletic program to the organization in the 1950s and installed the boxing ring in the basement, said Mark Schmeltzer, Mercy Home communications director.

Schmeltzer said the charity event began in 1991 when two traders from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board of Trade came together with an idea to raise money for Mercy Home through amateur boxing.

"There was a natural rivalry between the companies," he said.

Though Ringside started out as a rivalry between the financial

exchanges, it has grown and expanded to include others, like the legal profession. At least three lawyers are participating in Ringside this year.

Schmeltzer said Mercy Home's boxing ring was used in the 1950s and 1960s by Chicago's pro fighters, including Muhammad Ali.

But, he said, the ring fell into disrepair in the 1970s and 1980s.

Glenn Leonard, a former Chicago Board of Trade employee turned personal training entrepreneur, matches up and prepares Ringside participants, like Birnbaum and Langer, and has been involved in the event since its inception in 1991.

"Back when I first started training the guys for the event, we used to have to train at parks district [facilities]," he said.

So, Leonard said, he refurbished the ring in the 1990s and also uses it for his personal training business.

"We decided to use the Mercy Home's own facilities and in the meantime I could run my own business," he said. "Everybody helps each other out and it works."

Ringside for Mercy's Sake is the biggest fundraising event for Mercy Home. The facility exists on private funding alone.

Schmeltzer said the organization relies on fundraising from Ringside and other events to

WANT TO GO?

Mercy Home's fundraiser Ringside for Mercy's Sake will take place from 6 p.m. to midnight, Oct. 14, at the Chicago Marriott Grand Ballroom on Michigan Avenue. For more information, contact Jim Marrese at (312) -738-7578.

subsidize the resources, programs and support that the home offers to disadvantaged youth in the city.

Birnbaum said assistance for Mercy Home through Ringside is especially significant since support for the event has shifted as

Chicago's financial trading markets have become computerized.

"The cause is a huge thing, and the support for this has changed over the years," he said. "It used to be a big Board of Trade thing, and now that the floors are closed they need to get new blood, so to speak."

Langer, who picked up amateur boxing four years ago, said Mercy Home is such an important part of the community.

"It provides our youth with an escape from poverty, abuse or neglect," he said. "It's a great cause, and it allows us to do what we like, which is boxing and contributing to the Mercy Home ... There is no greater cause."