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GLAD TO STILL BE GIVING

Baron Mayer winner Leonard survived serious health scare

By Ethan Forman

Staff writer

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DANVERS — This year's recipient of the Baron Mayer Award for community service said he is lucky to be alive to accept the accolade later this month.

Thomas Leonard, a well-known, 74-year-old retired banker with a long list of community service on the North Shore, had a brush with death in December.

That's when a strep infection ravaged his left leg after he slipped and scraped it in a fall from a wall.

The wound became a purple blotch that "was starting to walk right up my leg," he said.

A couple of days after the incident, he wasn't feeling well, and he went to Beverly Hospital, where doctors found the infection had spread.

After two days in the hospital, they brought in Marge, his wife of 49 years, and told her she had a few hours to decide whether to have his leg removed or lose him completely.

"She made the right decision, obviously," Leonard said. "She kept me alive, and I was virtually right at death's door last December."

Leonard was told he would not walk again, and that he was not a good candidate for a prosthesis because he had had a small stroke.

In all, he spent 107 days in the hospital, including a stint at the Spaulding Hospital for Continuing Medical Care North Shore in Salem. That's where they fitted him for an artificial leg in January.

On Tuesday, he walked on his new leg into the Salem Rotary Club's meeting in the ballroom of the Hawthorne Hotel for the first time since taking ill in December.

Later this month, Leonard plans to be at the Baron Mayer Award Champagne Reception at the start of Danvers Family Festival, where he will be honored for his community service. His résumé of affiliations, awards and accomplishment is two pages long.

"I was very humbled to get this award," said Leonard, who has received many awards over the years for his work while at the Salem Five, where he was a senior vice president in retail banking and in community affairs.

He said he is especially honored to receive this latest award from the town where he has lived for the past 35 years, having won the Danvers Community Council award in 2007.

"Now this almost completes the cycle, as well," Leonard said.

Leonard and his wife were reassured the award was not given out of sympathy for the loss of his leg. Few have done more in the community, those who know him say.

"He's a remarkable man," said Town Manager Wayne Marquis, who was one of those who nominated Leonard. He called Leonard's list of accomplishments is "jaw-dropping."

"Tom is a guy who is invested in whatever he is interested in," Marquis said.

Not for recognition

The father of two grown sons, Michael of Northborough and Mark of Danvers, Leonard was the president of the Danvers Touchdown Club and coached youth hockey when he was younger. He was president of the Catholic Couples Club and served on the Danvers State Hospital Re-use Task Force as it mulled the redevelopment of the sprawling state mental hospital. He is a present member of the Danvers Finance Committee, which he has served on since 2003.

His community work extends well beyond Danvers. He was chairman emeritus of the Salem Partnership, an economic development organization in Salem. He received a number of awards in Salem, including the Businessman of the Year Award from the Salem Chamber of Commerce in 1996.

"I have never done any of this stuff for recognition," Leonard said. "I just did it because it needed to be done."

Leonard said he hopes his disability will not hinder his efforts to remain active, working on behalf of young people through the Salem Boys & Girls Club, and with seniors through North Shore Elder Services and the Danvers Council on Aging. He wants to remain active with the Essex National Heritage Area Commission, of which he is president emeritus.

"I need to be in the game, I need to be playing the game, and that's why I need to be back in these organizations I am a part of," he said. "I just can't do lip service to the organization. I have to participate. I have to do some heavy lifting."

Leonard, a Salem native who also lived in Peabody for a time, worked for Salem Five for about four decades.

Over the years, Leonard became deeply involved with his high school alma mater, St. John's Prep.

"In many ways, he's a role model for the prep community," said the Catholic boys prep school's new headmaster and former principal, Ed Hardiman. Leonard embodies the ideals of a Xaverian education of faith, family and community, Hardiman said, someone who does things with humility.

Leonard said he wants to write a book about his health scare and become an advocate for the disabled on the North Shore. His immediate goal is to get back on the golf course.

He said his faith that he would recover carried him through the tough times.

"Belief. It's a single word we lived by during this entire process," Leonard said. "If you believe you will get better and you believe you will overcome these difficulties, you will."

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