

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS RELEASE**

**June 11, 2010**

### **“Belleville Education Foundation to Sponsor 2010 Wall of Recognition Banquet”**

The Belleville Education Foundation will sponsor its third Wall of Recognition banquet celebration on the evening of Thursday, October 14, 2010. Six distinguished individuals who attended the Belleville School District will be honored for their outstanding contributions to society since their time in Belleville. Selected by the Belleville Board of Education, they will be inducted that afternoon in a ceremony at Belleville High School, and then will be honored with a dinner at The Chandelier at 6:30 PM.

Board President Bill Freda announced the honorees at the Senior Awards Assembly on Thursday, June 3. They are John Senesky, Lonnie Bunch, Nicholas Melito, Nicholas Amato, Sergeant Major Don deHagara, and Ralph Salerno. Mr. Melito will be inducted posthumously.

**Lonnie G. Bunch III, Ph.D., class of 1970** is the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. As the museum's director, Bunch has identified the museum's mission, is developing exhibitions and public programs, and coordinating the museum's fundraising and budget development. Among his many awards, he was appointed by President George W. Bush to the Commission for the Preservation of the White House in 2002. In 2005, the American Association of Museums named Bunch one of the 100 most influential museum professionals of the 20th century.

**Nicolas Arnold Melito, class of 1965** didn't let cerebral palsy stop him from being a top comedy writer. Known in the industry as Nick Arnold, he joined the staff of "The Tonight Show" at 21, Johnny Carson's youngest writer. After three years of writing monologues, he moved on to write and co-produce "The Cher Show" for CBS. Then he became a writer-producer on ABC's "Welcome Back Kotter" and exec producer on CBS' "Private Benjamin." Melito's credits as a writer and producer include HBO series "First and Ten," CBS' "Sweating Bullets" and "Love at First Sight," the first network comedy to feature a disabled person, which he created and produced. Mr. Melito passed away following a brief illness in 1999.

**Nicholas R. Amato, Esq., class of 1957** has a diverse and extensive background in legal, governmental and business affairs spanning over three decades. He has held a variety of public and private positions during his professional career. He served as Senior Vice-President, General Counsel and Secretary for Resorts International Holdings, LLC and its subsidiaries. Mr. Amato was appointed by Governor Florio to serve as Executive Director of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority whose charge is to redistribute millions of dollars of Atlantic City casino revenues for the betterment of New Jersey's economy and society. Mr. Amato also served as President of the Casino Association of New Jersey. Prior to his work in the casino industry, Mr. Amato served in elective public

office, serving three successive five-year terms as the Essex County Surrogate and was elected Essex County Executive.

**Ralph J. Salerno, Esq., class of 1957** is an expert in land use and real estate law. Over several decades of practice in this field, he has handled major residential and commercial development matters for a wide range of New Jersey's most prominent real estate developers. In December of 2008, Mr. Salerno was named to the New Jersey Real Estate Advisory Board and worked closely with the Governor's Office of Economic Growth as well as other State Departments to encourage economic development and revitalization across the state.

**John Senesky, class of 1964** was a superb teacher in the Belleville school system for 35 years. He was the head football coach at Belleville High School from 1977 to 1996. Prior to that, he was an assistant varsity coach at BHS (1973-1976) and before that, the freshman coach from 1968 to 1972. Not only did this man win games on the field, including a phenomenal run of four NJSIAA playoff appearances between 1979 and 1984, but he also made an indelible impression on the young men he coached.

**Sergeant Major Donald de Hagara, class of 1977** has devoted his entire adult life to the service of our nation and embodies the spirit and intent of the "Wall of Recognition". He has had a distinguished 30-year career in the U.S. Marine Corps, having achieved the highest enlisted rank in the Marine Corps. He is the recipient of many medals and commendations and served in Iraq. Most recently Sergeant Major de Hagara was in charge of training 26 helicopter squadrons for deployment to Iraq.

For more information on the banquet and the inductees, you may go to the Belleville Education Foundation website at [www.bellef.org](http://www.bellef.org).

Foundation Chairman Joseph R. Cervasio stated, "The wonderful Wall of Recognition initiative provides the Foundation with a fund-raising event to continue to make financial contributions to the Belleville School District." He continued, "Since its inception, dollars have been invested in grants, student recognitions, and the Connie Francis Theatre entrance façade. And, we are processing more grant applications by teachers and administrators right now. It's all about enhancing the learning experience in Belleville from outside the tax structure."

Ann Schneider, former popular and distinguished Belleville High School teacher, Foundation Trustee and Co-Chairperson of the Grant Committee, added, "We encourage creative and committed educators to apply for grants, and we are working to make the application process easy. The Foundation is especially pleased to have received wonderful appreciative letters from past recipients describing the direct benefits to the students."

"Close to \$10,000 has been or is in the process of being distributed, and we have more to award," said Barbara Freda, Foundation Treasurer. "The Grant Committee Selection team

has high standards, but all applications from our teachers so far show a passion for their students and the educational process overall.”

Other exciting news announced centered around the October 2009 Connie Francis Weekend, during which the 1955 Belleville graduate and international singing icon was also inducted onto the Wall of Recognition. Not only is more Connie Francis memorabilia available for purchase, but the long-awaited 3-part DVD set of the entire weekend of her recognition is now for sale. Mrs. Freda said, “A \$100 investment will get you the entire set that captures priceless Belleville moments, including the Auditorium dedication in Connie’s honor on that Friday at BHS, her street-naming ceremony at Number Five School the next day, as well as the Belleville Library reception and Sunday Gala at Naninas.” She added that 50 sets signed by the Queen of Rock ‘n’ Roll will be sold for a \$250 contribution. Special discount prices will be reserved for student and other educational constituencies. (Orders are now being taken at 973-751-2588 and on line at [www.bellef.org](http://www.bellef.org). )

Trustee Anthony Santasieri heads up the Connie Francis Music Theatre Seat Sale Committee and has updated that strategy. Gold plated dedications can be purchased for as little as \$50 each by Community Service Organizations and other groups interested in sets of 10 seats. Mezzanine seats are at a \$250 donation, while Orchestras will merit \$500, and the “Legend Rows” will require a \$1000 contribution. Santasieri said, “This fund-raising event allows anyone to honor loved ones, favorite teachers, friends, etc., while being a part of dedications that already include contributions by legendary singer, Neil Sedaka, a friend of Ms. Francis.”

Any questions about the Belleville Education Foundation can be answered at its website at [www.bellef.org](http://www.bellef.org) or by contacting Chairman Cervasio at 973-725-8713.