

Hats Off To Our Person-Of-The-Year

John Tunney III

Three years makes a tradition, so consider Long Islander Newspapers naming its Person-of-the-Year in the last issue before the new year begins just that – a tradition. This is the third year we have named a member of the community as the year’s significant newsmaker. Our Person of the Year for 2008 – Huntington-based restaurateur John Tunney III – joins the list of newsmakers recognized for their impact on the greater Huntington community.

Technically the tradition began in January 2007 when our newspaper group inaugurated its monthly Long Islander Life magazine by naming Glenda Jackson its first Person-of-the-Year for 2006. Then a newly elected Huntington Councilwoman, Jackson was selected for the significant role she plays in Huntington history. When she was appointed to the Town Board early in 2006, she became the first African-American to serve on the town’s governing body. Later that year, she won a sweet Election Day victory, becoming the first African-American to win election to the Town Board. Though her early days as a board member were not without controversy, the recognition by the town of minority representation on the board was a significant move forward. For that, she earned Person-of-the-Year honors.

Lloyd Harbor resident Kevin O’Neill took the honors for 2007. A dynamic businessman who retired young from a Wall Street career, O’Neill’s second career had a profound impact on the community. O’Neill is the founder, owner and now executive producer of the John Engeman Theater at Northport, which brings Broadway-calibre live theater to downtown Northport year-round.

O’Neill’s renovation of the theater alone had significant

economic impact, and once the first curtain rose, the theater has continued to play an important role in the economy of downtown Northport. For his vision, contribution to the local economy and contributions to the community’s artistic culture, O’Neill earned Person-of-the-Year honors a year ago.

As the end of 2008 approached, our editorial board began to discuss the possibilities. One of the names that quickly surfaced was that of the man who we would recognize this year: John Tunney. A successful restaurateur, Tunney, his brother David and John Reiger are partners in a growing mini-empire of restaurants on Long Island. In an industry known for its high rate of failure, Tunney seems to have a golden touch with Honu Kitchen and Cocktails, two Besito Mexican restaurants with a third on the way, and the newest launch, American Roadside Burgers.

What caught our eye about Tunney, however, was another recent project, this one philanthropic in nature. On Veterans Day, Tunney launched “Ten Fingers, Ten Toes, Five Bucks,” a yearlong effort to raise what he hopes will be millions of dollars to assist injured veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. We have no doubt this effort will be gilt by the same golden touch that has made Tunney’s restaurant ventures so successful.

John Tunney has earned a place at the top of the restaurant community in a place we like to call the Restaurant Capital of Long Island. For the part he plays in making Huntington just that, his contribution to and participation in the business community and his many philanthropic contributions, Long Islander Newspapers proudly names John Tunney III is Person-of-the-Year for 2008.

Congratulations, John.

