

# FRIARS FOUNDATION APPLAUSE FOR FRANCIS & WILF

BY BARRY DOUGHERTY

The Friars Foundation held their annual Applause Award Gala at the Waldorf Astoria on June 6th with an evening that combined business with pleasure. The business being to raise funds for the Foundation's mission to foster the performing arts through scholarships and grants to arts organizations.



Prior Stewie Stone, Friar Leonard Wilf, Ambassador Joseph Zappala

Their Gift of Laughter Wounded Warrior Program sends entertainers to military hospitals to entertain those soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. The gala honors individuals who have made enormous contributions to entertainment and business as well as their humanitarian endeavors.

This year, legendary singer Connie Francis received the Foundation's Creative Achievement Award and Friar Leonard A. Wilf, the co-owner of the Minnesota Vikings, their Lifetime Achievement Award. Foundation Chairman, Ambassador Joseph Zappala, announced that scholarships would be named in their honor.

Before the guests of honor got their due the spotlight went to presenting two members with Friar of the Year awards—James O'Donnell and Matt Scheckner. With Friarly bravado the pair were escorted onstage by showgirls, courtesy of these two honorees. While Scheckner admitted, "Placing my name in the pantheon of all the great prior winners and my



Friar Leonard Wilf, Harrison Wilf, Beth Wilf

fellow winner tonight, Jim O'Donnell, suggests the decline of the Friars Club. I am deeply, deeply honored to receive this honor this evening." O'Donnell was equally humbled by the honor, "I have no idea why I was honored as Friar of the Year but I'm blessed. I feel as if I won the peace prize before I was due so my goal now is to earn this job. Thank you very much."

When the lights dimmed in the ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria, time tiptoed backwards a bit to the 1960s and 1970s as the Hank Lane Orchestra played

an overture of Francis' hits to slides of vintage Connie. Afterward, Master of Ceremonies Friar Tony Orlando took the stage and launched into *Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Old Oak Tree*, which he dedicated to the Wounded Warriors who were seated in the audience as part of the Foundation's Gift of Laughter Program.

Orlando noted to the seven hundred plus crowd, "I met Connie in 1961 and to think fifty years later I'm able to be the emcee for this woman who carried herself with the grace and elegance of a great star and a great human being."

Friar Jerry Blavat is a popular DJ who is just as famous as those musicians whose music he plays. A fan and friend of Connie's, Blavat said, "Connie Francis lives for the audience and you people have made Connie a star. You are a very special human being, you never lost your passion, you never lost your zest."

Dean Freddie Roman just got back from a cruise. "Here's what people do on a cruise to the Caribbean: 8:30 breakfast, 9:30 bouillon, 10:30 sandwiches, 11:30 snacks, 12:30 lunch, 1:30 hors d'oeuvres, 2:30 canapes, 3:30 fruit, 4:30 something to eat, 6:00 dinner, 12:00 a smorgasbord like you couldn't believe, 2 in the morning pizza—3 in the morning everyone goes to the rail and throws up."

Friar Neil Sedaka shares a very special bond with Connie, "My first hit was done by Connie Francis, it was called *Stupid Cupid*, in 1958." Dedicated to the woman who gave him his start, he took us down Sedaka Lane with *Breaking Up Is Hard To Do*, *The Hungry Years* and *Laughter In The Rain*.



Friars Tony Orlando and Neil Sedaka

The forever angry but always funny Friar Pat Cooper noted, "The first time I worked with Connie Francis was at the Copacabana. I never knew her or what she does besides singing. I worked with her for twelve days and lost eleven pounds. Why did I lose eleven pounds? Because she does not allow air conditioning while she's singing. So anytime you wanna lose weight you work with Connie Francis. This is not a career move for me."

Cooper had a field day chiding Wilf—pretending he wasn't clear on his name much less his career. "I want to thank those who stood up for me earlier. This is not for standing up, this is not for anybody but Connie Francis and Lou Wilf whatever he does I don't know. I don't look at football, I don't know why he buys pigskins, he's a Jew!" said Cooper.

*Baby It's You* is the hot Broadway show based on Florence Greenberg's discovery of The Shirelles. Some of the cast performed their hits *Mama Said* and *He's So Fine*—needless to say, they were.

Friars Prior Stewie Stone loves a good Roast and if Friar Abe Vigoda is going to be in the audience then how is he supposed to resist? "Abe, was the ground cold when you got up this morning?" In talking about IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn, he said to Wilf, "You're a worldly guy, you travel a lot. You ever see a maid you wanna shtup?"

Jay Black sang his greatest hits, *This Magic Moment* and *Cara Mia*, hitting those high notes just as he did in 1965. He involved the audience in singing the chorus of *Come A Little Bit Closer*, and after a stuttering start they came through for him.

Of Connie, Black noted, "That cry in her voice, there's no female singer that topped her—unbelievable. My favorite was the Jewish song, 'Where the Goys Are.'"

Ambassador Zappala and Prior Stewie Stone presented Wilf with his Friars Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award. "I'm proud to be here as a



Connie Francis and Friar Neil Sedaka

Friar—twenty five years this year—my sponsor was Henny Youngman so it's a long time. It's a great place, I love it. My co-honoree Connie Francis and I have two things in common: first, we're both originally from New Jersey and more importantly, we're both supporters of all the military does for us. We support the wounded warriors who are here tonight. I will continue my good works. I will continue as a Friar. I want to thank all my friends and all my family," said Wilf.

The evening was Chaired by Friar John Catsimatidis with a show produced by Friar Mark Krantz, and it really was a showcase to remember.

Orlando had a little help from some iconic Friar favorites when it came to bringing Connie to the stage. A vignette of various introductions from some of her television appearances included Ed Sullivan, Frank Sinatra, Jack Benny, David Frost, Mike Douglas, Perry Como, Regis Philbin, Steve Lawrence, Merv Griffin, Sid Caesar, Andy Williams, Dean Martin, Bob Hope and, of course, Dick Clark—who gave her career a huge boost playing her hits on *American Bandstand*.

For her part, Connie presented us with her greatest hits, starting with the Sedaka sensation that became her signature song, *Where the Boys Are*. Neil joined her for *Stupid Cupid*, which she followed up with the ballad, *If I Never Sang Another Song*.

Dean Roman and Ambassador Zappala presented Connie with the Friars Foundation's Creative Achievement Applause Award. Acknowledging the wounded warriors in the audience, Connie noted, "Last year I was appointed national spokesperson for Mental Health America and I'm going to do every-



Friar Pat Cooper, Friar Joseph Zappala, Connie Francis, Isabella Zappala

thing I possibly can do in the coming years to help our returning servicemen and women. It's a largely unattended area." Such endeavors are what earned her this award in the first place so her announcement came as no surprise to the Foundation Directors.

Connie acknowledged the event's Executive Producer, "I want to thank my muse, my force, my inspiration. A man who has made impossible things for me very, very possible. There's nobody like this fella, what an amazing man you are—Bruce Charet."

She closed the show bringing the performers back on and singing *God Bless America*. Another fun Friars night in the name of charity...music...and always laughs!

See center spread for photos



**Leonard Boxer, Enid Boxer, Friar Leonard Wilf**



**Friar Leonard Wilf with the US Joint Forces Color Guard**



**Friar Bill Boggs, Connie Francis, Friar Abe Vigoda**



**Matt Scheckner, Friar of the Year**



**Friar Neil Sedaka**



**Nichole Henry singing the National Anthem**



**Friar Pat Cooper and Connie Francis**



**Friars Len Cariou, Alison Chaplin, Dick Capri**



**Friars Frank Pellegrino, Danny Aiello**



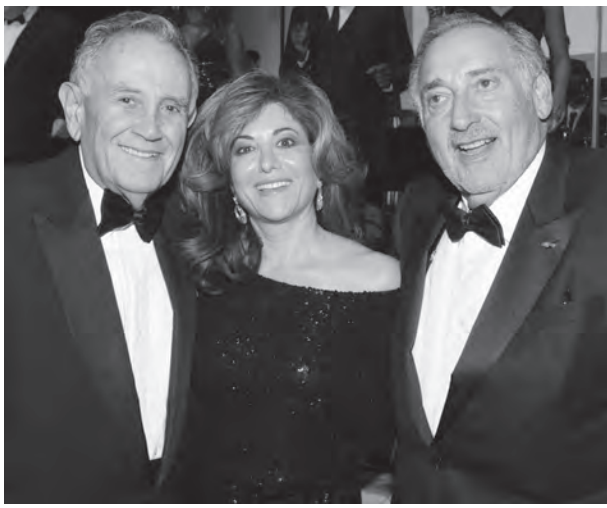
**Friar Pat Cooper, Friar Leonard Wilf, Friar Tony Orlando, Jay Black**



**Friar Jerry Blavat, Friar Tony Orlando, Prior Stewie Stone, Frani Stone**



**Barbara and Journal Chairman Friar Martin P. Klein**



**Ambassador Friar Joseph Zappala,  
Janice Worth, Friar Myron Shevell**



**Dinner Chairman Friar John Catsimatidis with  
Ambassador Friar Joseph Zappala**



**Connie Francis and performers sing  
*God Bless America***



**Jay Black**



**The Cast of *Baby It's You***



**Friar Carl and Lynn Goldstein**



**Friar of the Year Jim O'Donnell**



**Friar Tony Orlando**



**Friar Deana Martin and John Griffith**



**Friars Ralph Compagnone, Dominic Chianese,  
Dean Freddie Roman, Linda Compagnone**



**Dean Freddie Roman, Connie Francis,  
Friars Neil Sedaka, Ambassador Joseph Zappala**



**Friars Pat Greenwald, Ambassador Joseph Zappala  
with members of the US Joint Forces Color Guard**