



JENNIFER BROWN/SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

Jim Oettinger, Closter's recreation director, by the monument to George Potterton, who served 40 years as recreation director. The borough will mark the commission's 60th anniversary over Labor Day weekend.

Everyone's game in Closter

Labor Day bash also celebrates recreation commission

By **DEENA YELLIN**
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CLOSTER – As the borough prepares for its Labor Day weekend celebration, an occasion that also marks the 60th anniversary of the Closter recreation commission, its director said the rec program is thriving and growing.

Jim Oettinger, the director, cites the successful Challenger League, which draws participants with disabilities from all around the area for baseball and basketball, track and horseback riding. Golf and tennis teams are active for the first time in Closter, in addition to the traditional baseball, soccer and softball.

Oettinger said the goal in coming year is to introduce junior lacrosse.

The commission runs the town's team sports programs and recreational events,

and this year offers more programs than ever, with about 700 young people participating, Oettinger said.

The Labor Day weekend celebration at Veterans Memorial Park starts on Sept. 2 and continues through the evening of Sept. 5. It is expected to draw thousands of people and features a volleyball tournament, 5K run, zip line, magic show, concert, food vendors and a fireworks display, Oettinger said.

He credits George Potterton, who died seven years ago, with creating Closter's rec commission; Potterton served as its director for 40 years.

"This is the oldest rec commission in Bergen County," Oettinger said. "It's quite a legacy he started – other towns with rec commissions mirrored what Closter did."

Potterton, a physical education teacher, had a vision of getting girls involved in sports at a time when it was not the norm,

said his son, Steve Potterton, who is involved in the commission. "He was ahead of his time on that."

"A lot of the towns around us don't have commissions," Steve Potterton said. "This is more hands-on. It's personal. You get to know the parents and all the kids a lot better."

In Closter, the commission – composed of two part-time employees and a roster of 23 members and more than 180 volunteer coaches – organizes all the borough's sports and recreational activities.

Oettinger said the borough's central recreation program promotes both residents' health and town pride.

"We offer programs for every child, regardless of their ability," said Oettinger. "We're all here for the kids."

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