



**LAS VEGAS FINALE** Michael Schwartz and wife, Laura, with Cuba Gooding on the set of *The Contender*

### BOXING'S FAVORITE DOC

Dr. Michael Schwartz felt awkward accepting the Ringside Physician of the Year Award in Atlantic City last fall. After all, he is president, chairman and founder of the American Association of Professional Ringside Physicians, the organization that honored him.

"It was wonderful to be recognized, but I didn't start the organization to win awards," says Schwartz, who founded the AAPRP in 1997. "I started it because boxers were getting hurt, even killed, and something needed to be done about it."

Schwartz, who practices at Associated Internists of Darien, is Connecticut's chief ringside physician and served as the medical consultant for the NBC reality show *The Contender*.

"Boxing is an obsession now," he admits. "I started before the casinos came into the state. Now with Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods, I get to see some of the best fights in the world."

He works ringside with fighters during bouts and also counts boxers among his regular patients. Some, like Norwalk's Travis Simms, the former World Boxing Association super welterweight champion, are well known. But other fighters are uninsured and would not be able to afford medical care without his help.

"He goes out of his way to assist fighters," Simms says of Schwartz. "A lot of fighters don't have the money to go to a doctor,

but he helps them out. He cares about the safety of individual boxers and boxing as a whole."

Schwartz works hard to spread the word about boxing safety. He travels throughout the world lecturing on the topic and recently testified before Congress about the importance of forming a national boxing commission with AAPRP as the medical arm. Currently each state has its own commission, and the required physical condition of a boxer varies greatly from state to state.

Although once limited to dimly lit gyms, boxing is gaining in popularity.

"Boxing has created a whole new way of staying in shape," Schwartz says. "If you think about it, with the exception of a few heavyweights, boxers are incredibly fit."

— Chris Bosak

### SONGS JUST HAPPEN

When P. J. Pacifico cofronted the band Sunflower eight years ago, the seed had been germinating most of his life.

"My aunt lived in Greenwich Village in the 1960s and '70s, where she was surrounded by great music," says the thirty-three-year-old, whose initials stand for Paul Joseph. "The Village back then produced all kinds of wonderful

singer/songwriters — James Taylor, Bob Dylan, Fleetwood Mac, John Denver. So I was spoiled with great music — it was just always there."

Meanwhile, back in Darien, his mom sang in a barbershop quartet and rehearsed in the family kitchen, where young P. J. instinctively began to pick up harmony. Soon he was learning to play drums, and a few years later, when he took up the guitar, he started writing songs.

Shortly after hooking up with Sunflower, where he sang and played lead guitar, an unlikely client offered Pacifico's cover band an unusual chance to tour the world.


"The Department of Defense sent us overseas to entertain the troops," he recalls. "The first tour was Egypt, Turkey, Jordan and Israel and the second tour included Panama, Haiti and more. It's an experience that I'll never forget."

Yet soon after returning stateside, the band fizzled. So, along with former members

Dave Kimball and Greg Bednar, he started Side By Each, earning a loyal following at East Coast clubs like Toad's Place. They also played at Rowayton's Rivercat and at Amberjacks in Norwalk.

But when fans asked for a CD, P. J. realized he needed help from the

recording establishment. Fortunately, he met Jonathan Stuart of Viper Records, and soon he was recording the songs that he had been writing over the years. His debut solo album, *Well I'll Be*, has just been released on Viper. "Having label support makes a huge difference," he says.

Now P. J. continues his steady acoustic gig on Tuesday nights at Darien's Black Goose. To keep him humble (and pay the rent), he also tends bar in Darien at Backstreet, and he is planning a national tour to promote the CD. "But writing songs is my real passion," he says. "Sometimes they are based on true stories and sometimes they aren't — songs just happen." 



**P. J. PACIFICO**

CLAIRE CHIMENTO