

# Yonkers entrepreneur proves he can roll with the punches

By MARY T. PRENON

Seven years ago, on his way to pick up a breakfast of beer and cigarettes, Nick Delury collapsed in a gutter in White Plains. He was homeless, unemployed, dependent on drugs and alcohol, and constantly in trouble with law enforcement authorities.

Today, Delury, 28, is a healthy, sober and successful business owner. He is the proprietor of The Boxing Connection and Fitness Center, an independently owned boxing gym in Yonkers.

Recently, Delury moved the growing business from a small location in Mount Vernon into a 6,300-square-foot facility — complete with regulation boxing ring — at 540 Nepperhan Ave. in the Nepperhan Business Center.

Delury credits his commitment to boxing and friends like former champion Kid Sharkey, a.k.a. Maurice Sposato, with helping him turn around his life. "I had a nervous breakdown that day when I was sitting in the gutter, but I looked up, saw The Cage, and decided to go in," he said.

"The Cage," a former city- and state-funded boxing program in White Plains, was where Delury met Sposato, 81, and retired boxer Kenny Mack Sr. "Kenny and I talked for hours, then we made a pact to quit drugs and alcohol together," Delury recalled. "It was a pact for life."

Boxing soon replaced the need for substance abuse, and Delury was able to hold down a job. "I guess it was easy to fall into that lifestyle. I've basically been on my own since I was 14. My mother was a drug addict and took off soon after my father was killed."

Delury said the demise of The Cage prompted him to open The Boxing Connection. "That was the best program in the teen center and I was angry that they closed it down. I'm alive because of that program."

Determined to have his own boxing gym, Delury opened a small facility in Mount Vernon. To fund the enterprise, he



Nick Delury and Kid Sharkey at The Boxing Connection and Fitness Center in Yonkers.

worked at a gasoline station during the week from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., then opened his gym from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

However, the long hours soon took their toll, and Delury had another nervous breakdown. He quit his night job and began working with local sports clubs as a boxing and aerobics instructor. Believing he couldn't secure a bank loan, Delury continued using his own money to fund The Boxing Connection. "I just did what I had to do to keep it going. There were a lot of times I couldn't eat."

Initially, Delury funneled almost every penny of profit back into the business, allowing him to purchase weight training equipment and a \$30,000 regulation-size boxing ring.

When Mack died, Delury nearly had a setback. "I felt like just going out and getting drunk, but I remembered that we made that pact for life, and I was still alive."

Lacking any formal business training, Delury made plans to expand The Boxing



Connection, which began to grow in popularity among a very diverse crowd. "We have construction workers, college students, teachers, bankers and a lot of women," he said.

The Boxing Connection has 320 members who pay \$150 for a three-month period. Most of the revenue comes from membership, with some residual income from food and drink products and personal training.

With Sposato as his head trainer, Delury said his new Yonkers facility has been attracting even more people looking for an alternative workout. "Boxing is the best thing for cardiovascular training and muscle toning. It's an intense workout because every part of your body is moving," said Delury.

According to the American Council on Exercise in San Diego, Calif., many health clubs offer classes in non-contact boxing. "I think people are ready for something new, and this is a lot more challenging," said Holli Spicer, director of professional development.

Spicer, who has taught step classes for nine years, said boxing also demonstrates self-defense moves. "If you're watching a class it may not look like you're getting a hard workout, but when you're doing it, you can feel it. The fast punches really get your heart rate up."

Spicer said they've also worked with Thomas "the Promise" Trebotich, a former boxer who is now developing "Boxerobics" classes nationwide.

In addition to non-contact and amateur boxing, The Boxing Connection also serves as a training center for full-contact, professional boxing.

Sposato, who once fought Sugar Ray Robinson to a draw, doesn't let his age get in the way of his job as head trainer. Besides, he said, he has too much energy to retire. "It's something I never get tired of."

A boxer since 1932, Sposato said his ringside name of "Kid Sharkey" was a spin-off of Tom Sharkey, "a boxer in the old days."

Though he may walk a little slower these days, Sposato can still climb into the ring and demonstrate the punching bag and speed bag. Over the years, he has worked with Carl "the Truth" Williams, Larry Holmes, Buster Mathis, Cleo Daniels, Jose Torres and Lou Savarese.

"I used to hang out at the gym with boxers when I was about 14," said Sposato. "It was good because it kept us off the streets and out of trouble."

Sposato's picture in his boxing heydays now graces the walls of The Boxing Connection, along with those of "Boom-Boom" Lenny Mancini, Jerry Quarry and Muhammad Ali.

Delury said he feels lucky to have Sposato with him. He also makes a point of involving himself in local charitable efforts to benefit children. Working with Children's Village in Dobbs Ferry, Delury often organizes bus trips to boxing events and offers disadvantaged youths a chance to learn boxing, in exchange for helping out at the gym.

"The Cage gave me life and now it's for me to give something back."