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'Freedom Fest' puts a face on war in Iraq

By NATE SCHWEBER
SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

Fund-raiser helps family of Clifton man killed in combat

EAST RUTHERFORD — Annie Movello went to the Park City Bar and Grille on Sunday because she heard there was a charity event for a soldier killed in Iraq.

When she found out the soldier was Michael Tarlavsky, a Clifton resident, she gasped and put her hand to her mouth.

"I went to high school with him," Movello said.

Movello was one of hundreds who packed the Park City for "Freedom Fest," which featured 10 rock bands. The bands played for free, and sponsors donated electric guitars, tattoos, and makeovers for a raffle to raise money for Tarlavsky's 10-month-old son Joseph Michael and his widow, Tricia, who live in Clarksville,



TARLAVSKY

Tenn.

Tarlavsky, 30, died in Najaf, Iraq, on Aug. 12, when his unit was attacked with grenades and small arms. He was an Army captain in the 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group.

Movello, 32, graduated from Clifton High School in 1990, two years before Tarlavsky. Though she did-

n't know him, the realization that she went to school with him "really hit home," she said.

Tarlavsky, whose family immigrated to New Orleans from Latvia when he was 5, moved to Clifton in 1986. He was an Eagle Scout and captain of the Clifton High School swim team. He was the first Clifton resident to die in combat since Vietnam.

Freedom Fest was originally conceived to raise money for the families of victims who died on Sept. 11, said Jason Koepfel, president of Bars and Clubs magazine who organized the show. When Koepfel learned of Tarlavsky's death from an article on the Internet, he knew he had to do something for the fallen soldier's family.

"He had a 10-month-old son who's got to grow up without a father and all his family gets is a medal and a thank-you from the government," Koepfel said. "A See **SOLDIER** Page L-4

A band called The Bomb playing on Sunday at the Park City Bar and Grill in East Rutherford as part of a benefit to help the family of Michael Tarlavsky of Clifton, who became a Special Forces captain and was killed in Iraq.

KEVIN R. WEXLER/SPECIAL TO THE RECORD



Soldier

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lot of people like to go out, have a good time and spend money and this way they can still go out, but give something back."

Julia Branch and Daniela Cirilli both drove in from Edison, because they found out their favorite band, Big Orange Cone, was playing the charity show. They wouldn't have come all the way, they said, were it not for the cause.

"I knew a firefighter killed on 9/11 and there are firefighters in her family so we can relate a little bit," Cirilli said of Branch's family.

Lou Grasso, co-owner of the bar, said that he jumped at the chance

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JASON KOEPFEL, BENEFIT ORGANIZER

to host the benefit show, because he has friends serving in Iraq.

"It feels a little closer to home when you do something like this," he said.

Koepfel said he hoped to raise \$10,000 for the Tarlavskys. The proceeds will go to the Beth Sholom Reform Temple, where Rabbi Stanley Skolnik set up a fund for the family at Bank of America.

Skolnik said that Tarlavsky

liked rock music and would be "honored" by the show.

"He would've thought it was pretty cool," Skolnik said. "I think it's a very thoughtful thing, myself."

Anyone who would like to donate to Tarlavsky's family should make a check out to the Capt. Michael Tarlavsky Memorial Fund and send it to Beth Sholom, 733 Passaic Ave., Clifton, N.J., 07012.

E-mail: schweb@northjersey.com