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For immediate release:

Large Crowd Attends Wepner Statue Ceremony in Bayonne

On Saturday, November 12, a crowd of several hundred people attended the unveiling ceremony for the statue of boxing champion Chuck Wepner at Dennis P. Collins Park. The statue was created by Zhen Wu, a Chinese-born artist who lives in Bayonne. Among those at the ceremony were boxing greats Jerry Cooney, Larry Holmes, and Iran Barkley. Also in attendance were former New Jersey Governors Dick Codey and Jim McGreevey, State Assemblyman Will Sampson, Congressman-elect Rob Menendez, Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise, Hudson County Chief of Staff Craig Guy, Hudson County Commissioner Kenny Kopacz, Mayor Jimmy Davis, and City Council Members Gary LaPelusa, Juan Perez, Loyad Booker, Neil Carroll, and Jacqueline Weimmer.

Marine Corps representatives marched in to open the ceremony. Their presence honored Chuck Wepner's Marine Corps service.

Bayonne attorney Chris Patella gave welcoming remarks. He credited Chuck Wepner with having "put Bayonne on the map." Mr. Patella said that, in New Jersey, a few celebrities are recognizable by just their first names, such as "Bruce" for Springsteen, "Frank" for Sinatra, and "Chuck" for Wepner. He noted that the statue was placed in Dennis P. Collins Park, which is named after the late Mayor of Bayonne who served in that office from 1874 to 1990. Mr. Patella recalled that Mayor Collins

was at ringside in Cleveland when Chuck Wepner fought Muhammed Ali in 1975. He thanked all of the Bayonne officials and Public Works employees, and all supporters of the statue fundraisers for making the unveiling event possible.

Bayonne businessman Bruce Dillin, the co-chairman of the event, reported that his late father, Neil Dillin, said to him, "Get that statue done!" He predicted that Chuck Wepner's story will still be relevant when the statue remains standing 100 years from now.

Hudson County Commissioner Kenny Kopacz presented county proclamations to Chuck Wepner and Zhen Wu. He expressed "pride in Bayonne," and said that the statue would be here "for generations to come."

Assemblyman Will Sampson thanked the veterans and the Marine Corps representatives who took part in the ceremony. He offered a New Jersey legislative resolution honoring Chuck Wepner.

Liev Schreiber, the actor who portrayed Chuck Wepner in the movie *Chuck* (2016), described him as "a guy who fought his own demons harder and better than anyone else." Addressing Wepner, Schreiber said, "I am so proud and so grateful to you for letting me have your story." Wepner presented Schreiber with a hat that was emblazoned with the words "328 Stitches."

Mayor Davis brought artist Zhen Wu to the podium. He described Mr. Wu as Bruce Dillin's neighbor. That is how he became the sculptor for the statue. Mayor Davis called it "a typical Bayonne story." Then Chuck Wepner read aloud from a proclamation from Mayor Davis for Mr. Wu. In response, Mr. Wu said, "I love America," and he thanked everyone for their support. Explaining the statue's location in Dennis P. Collins Park, Mayor Davis said the decision was made to put the statue in a Bayonne park, that Dennis P. Collins Park is "a veterans' park," and that Chuck Wepner is a Marine.

Chuck Wepner pointed out his family members in the audience and thanked everyone. He said he would “never leave Bayonne.” The ceremony ended with the unveiling of the statue while musicians from The Bridgemen played the theme music from *Rocky*. Hundreds of people crowded around Chuck Wepner and the statue for photos while cameras from television news programs captured the scene.