At noon on December 10, the New York City Patrolman's Benevolent Association, Sergeants Benevolent Association, and Detectives Endowment Association hosted their annual holiday luncheon for the widows and children of NYPD police officers who lost their lives in the line of duty.

This year's bittersweet affair was held at Bridgewater's, a catering complex located in the South Street Seaport in downtown Manhattan. As usual, no shortage of celebrities—including several boxers—were in attendance to sign autographs, pose for pictures, and mingle with the hundreds of guests.

There was an undercurrent of tension in the air this year because less than seven hours earlier an off-duty police officer, Daniel Enchautegui, was shot and killed while attempting to thwart a burglary in his Bronx neighborhood.

The fact that one of the suspect's in the murder, Lillo Brancato Jr., is an actor who had a starring role in the film "A Bronx Tale" and a recurring role in the HBO hit television series "The Sopranos," was downright eerie because two actors who have had recurring roles on that show were in attendance.

One of them, Joseph Lisi, is a retired NYPD captain who played Dick Barone in several episodes during the 2000 season. He also played Lt. Swersky on the television series "Third Watch" from 2001-05.

Other celebrities included legendary disc jockey Cousin Brucie, former New York Yankees star Joe Pepitone, Randy Beverly and Mark Gastineau, both of whom played for the New York Jets, and the latter of whom was also a professional fighter, and actors LL Cool J and Skipp Sudduth, who played Officer John "Sully" Sullivan on "Third Watch."

Representing the boxing community was former three-division champion Iran Barkley, who over the years has proven to be a cop's best friend, heavyweight contender Monte Barrett, who glowed like a Christmas tree as he tried to keep tabs on his own handful of children, all of whom have virtuoso smiles that match their daddy's, and Mustafa Hamsho, the middleweight madman of the eighties who has shown himself to have as big of heart when he is playing with children than he did when punching, head-butting, and fouling opponents.

"I am very happy to be here," said Hamsho, as he played with the child of the late Vincent Ganz, an emergency services officer who was killed during the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. "I have a lot of my own kids, so I understand how much they miss their father. This is the least I can do."

When Hamsho was introduced to Ed Mullins, the president of the 11,000 member Sergeants Benevolent Association, which is the fifth largest police union in the country, Mullins was

incredulous.

"You're Mustafa Hamsho?" he said surprisingly. "You were always bleeding, but you look nothing like a fighter. You look more like a movie star."

When I informed Mullins that Hamsho had actually received about 100 stitches during his illustrious career, which included bouts against Marvin Hagler (twice), Alan Minter, Wilford Scypion, Curtis Parker, Donnie Lalonde, Wilfred Benitez, and Bobby Czyz, Hamsho quickly corrected me.

"One hundred and fifty," he said almost boastfully before attributing his middle-aged good looks to "good healing power."

As he does at the many police functions that he attends, Barkley does what he does best—which is to be his usual charming self. For a guy that has had no shortage of travels and travails over the years, he is never without a smile on his face and a pearl of wisdom to share.

Barkley, who sold himself to television as a bad dude from the mean streets of the South Bronx, is actually one of the nicest, kindest and gentlest souls you'll ever meet. This was immediately apparent when he was introduced to the family of Sgt. John Coughlin (pictured), another emergency services officer who lost his life while saving countless other lives on 9/11.

Barkley got teary-eyed when he eloquently explained the difference between what boxers and police officers do. He spoke from his heart with a wisdom and warmth that belies the image of him as a freewheeling slugger.

"Boxers are just entertainers," he said. "We fight to entertain other people. We get a lot of fans and those fans touch us. Even though we don't know them personally, they touch us and make us fight harder, be better.

"But police officers, they risk their lives to protect us," he continued. "They don't have fans the way athletes do. That officer that got killed this morning—he was off-duty. He didn't even have to get involved. That's why they touch more people than they think. And that's why I come to these things. If my being here touches just one person, that's like an early Christmas present to me."