

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Salinardi, Pannese earn state plaudits

■ **Coordinator of Year and Athlete of Year awards to be presented to Island duo tomorrow night in Albany**

By JOE D'AMODIO
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Staten Island Special Olympics coordinator Rich Salinardi and athlete Mary Pannese have won 1997 New York Special Olympics Board of Directors Awards.

The two will be among 14 individuals who will be honored at the New York Special Olympics annual awards program tomorrow night at the New York State Police Academy in Albany. Salinardi

will receive the Fran Tokar Area Coordinator Award, while Pannese will be bestowed with the Female Athlete of the Year Award.

The board of directors of New York Special Olympics, Inc., honors individuals, organizations, volunteers and athletes throughout the state who have made significant contributions to the program's growth. Nominations for the award are submitted by members of the organization and reviewed by the Awards Committee of the board of directors.

"It's really nice for me because New York State is the largest Special Olympics program and to be recognized as the top area coordinator is great. It's very prestigious," said Salinardi, a 51-year-old Eltingville resident.

Salinardi said he's accepting the

award on behalf of all the volunteers involved in the Staten Island Special Olympics, which made the award possible.

"Staten Island has a great program and even though I'm getting the award it's for all those people and volunteers that work very hard on Staten Island.

"Our volunteers probably have the longest longevity in New York State. Usually, volunteers stay around for 2-3 years, but here we have 25 or 30 people that have been with us 15-20 years. They can all be coordinators because they're really that good. Our program is run seven days a week and these people run all the various events."

Pannese, 32, has been one of the beneficiaries of the program, which has turned out top athletes over the years.

"Mary's involved in all sports,

but her main one is long distance running," said Elizabeth Fromkin, the assistant to the area coordinator. "She's brought her times down and she's quite a competitor."

"We're very proud of Mary. She's quite a young woman."

"I was in shock. I didn't expect it," said Pannese when she first learned she had won the award. "I thought, 'Wow! This is so nice!'"

Pannese, who is a member of the Special Olympics Athletes for Outreach, a program which promotes Special Olympics via the athletes, said she enjoys long distance running and swimming the most.

"I like it because it helps me stay in shape," laughed Pannese, a South Beach resident, who recently threw out a first pitch at a New York Mets game at Shea Stadium for her achievements with the Special Olympics.

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