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Award time in the 'arena,' some of the newsmakers from 2013 by Chris Collins

Another year is about to be put in the rearview, but before we break out the bubbly and toast 2014, it's time to wave goodbye to the year that was with the "In the Arena End of the Year Awards" for 2013.

■ The Bill Gates "Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk" Award goes to 2nd Berkshire Rep. Paul Mark, who earlier this year joined a number of Berkshire County colleagues in taking the "SNAP Challenge," where he had to survive for a week on the equivalent of what the subsidy a SNAP recipient receives for groceries. Mark didn't need to take the challenge to understand the concept of food insecurity, having grown up in working-class family that had gone through some lean times. But he did it anyway in a symbolic effort to raise awareness of a growing problem that is not getting better. Honorable mention goes to Congressman Jim McGovern, who walked 25 miles with Monte Belmonte this past November to raise money for the Food Bank of Western Mass.

■ And the Mike Bloomberg "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is" Award goes to Valley Steel Stamp owner Steve Capshaw and his fellow industry leaders who came across with some big dollars this year to establish a new training program for clean industry workers. That kind of private sector investment is somewhat rare in a commonwealth where we have become increasingly reliant on government dollars for our very survival. It's nice to know that there are still people out there willing to put a little "skin in the game" to create a better life, and economy, for our region.

■ It's time to wave goodbye to the year that was with the "In the Arena End of the Year Awards for 2013. And the envelopes go to ...

See you next year.

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