



Voices
OF OUR REGION
THE DISABILITY CONNECTION

Interviewee: **Guy Buzzelli, Jr.**

Interviewee Number: **16**

Interviewers: **Athena Aardweg, Judy Barricella**
& Tony Buba

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Voices of Our Region
Guy Buzzelli

Guy: My name is Guy Buzzelli, Jr. and I live in Bethel Park with my mom. I have a sister Darcy and two nephews, Ryan and Billy. I'm retired right now from the Port Authority. I worked there for 23 years and right now I'm involved with the Pittsburgh Pirate organization as a ticket sales representative. Part of the Pittsburgh Pirates called the Gold Club. I've been doing that for about 20 years. Part of what I do is selling group sales and season tickets and just out there promoting Pirate baseball. I've been doing a lot of work with the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Four years ago I was approached by MDA about an event that they were starting up called the MDA Muscle Team Event and they wanted me to be on the committee. It's an event that is held annually every year, usually in February or March, where we team up about 10 to 15 kids with Muscular Dystrophy and we match them up with a local Pittsburgh sports athlete for the evening. We have games brought in. We have a live auction, silent auction. And we go out and we sell corporate sponsorships to companies here in Pittsburgh and with a corporate sponsorship they get tickets to this event. So it started 4 years ago, that would have been in '05, and the very first year we raised \$67,000. This year was our fourth year and we raised \$308,000. So the event has really grown. And I think the reason why I really wanted to get involved was because when I was a kid, like 15-16 years old, I had the opportunity to go up to MDA summer camp and experience all that. So I felt that it was, you know, it would be nice to give back now and let the other small kids have the same opportunity that I had when I was a kid. So it's very gratifying and I was able to get our title sponsor, which was Walmart and Sam's Club, who was a customer of mine through the Pirates and I sold them Pirate tickets. And when I approached them about buying a sponsorship for our Muscle Team Event in 05, they bought 2 sponsorships that were like \$3,000 each. So it turns out that they had such a great time that the following year they got all the stores involved. So now they are our title sponsor for like \$35,000. Because of all the involvement I had with the event and all the corporations that I was able to bring in for sponsorships, they wanted to do something and they approached me about naming an award after me. They wanted to name it the Guy Buzzelli, Jr. Champion of Spirit Award and they had given it to me last year at the Muscle Team Event which was in 2007. A lot of my friends and family were there that night and it was actually pretty cool. And they told me this was going to be an annual award that would be given every year at the MDA Muscle Team Event. Muscular Dystrophy and myself, we talked and they want to do a Guy Buzzelli, Jr. Champion of Spirit golf outing in August. It is going to be the inaugural, first outing, it's going to be a golf outing that we're going to have every year. And we wanted to have it around my birthday.

Interviewer: So growing up did you go to regular school?

Guy: I went to regular school.

Interviewer: You were walking?

Guy: I was walking. I was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy when I was 9. I went to Overbrook School in Brookline. We lived in Brookline at the time. And I was slowing up in my running and wasn't keeping up with the rest of the kids. The gym teacher called my parents to let them know and they had taken me to Children's Hospital and we had a biopsy done and the biopsy showed that I had Muscular Dystrophy and Duchenne which is one of the progressive forms of Muscular Dystrophy. When I got to be 16, I was still walking at the time, I went to take a step while I was getting ready for school, I was getting dressed and I went to take a step and I lost my balance and fell and broke my femur bone in half and I was laid up for about a year in a hip spica cast. So ever since then it was very difficult for me to get back up and walk again after that so I've been in a wheelchair since 16, 17. Whenever we first moved to Bethel Park they were saying they wanted me to go to Pathfinder. The principal at Bethel Park and some of the school district people said "No we want Guy to go through the main school district of Bethel Park not Pathfinder." So I went to Lincoln, I went to Independence and it was funny back then because it was pretty accessible but when I went to North Middle School for 9th grade it was located up on Park Avenue and the building was several floors with no elevators, and steps. So I had such great friends in school that they would make a fireman's carry and they would carry me up the steps to get to my classes. And they always said that was Guy's Italian army. My friends. We actually had our picture in the paper locally here in Bethel and I had my friends around me and stuff. But that's the way it was in 9th. I graduated in June of 1980 and went to CCAC South Campus immediately after graduation and I got about 30 credits of college. And in January of 1981 was when I got the job at Port Authority. At the time I was working part time. Not part time. I'd say full time for Parker Plastic Corporation which is on Valley Drive here in Bethel Park and they are a company that makes different plastic parts for various companies. And I had to make a decision in January of 1981 whether I was going to stay working in this Parker Plastic Corporation or go to the Port Authority and that was probably the biggest decision and best decision that I ever made was to go to work for Port Authority in January 1981 because I had a long career there. 23 years.

Interviewer: So when you were growing up what's been the hardest thing for you?

Guy: Through the years you can see how things have changed in the way of ADA and accessibility and I think that was a big thing early on. But times are changing now and you can see the way, with the curb cuts and the way buildings, you know, have to be more accessible. You know, the newer buildings that are built they make sure that everything's accessible and stuff. But that was probably a big thing but now I don't really have too many problems right now as far as accessibility other than sometimes you go into the older buildings and they are not updated or something or you can't get into the bathroom or you can't get into certain areas of a building because the building is so old.

Interviewer: After you started having trouble walking when you were 9, did the kids make fun of you or... ?

Guy: All of my friends were really very loyal to me and like I said in 9th grade when I went to Park Avenue they would carry me up the steps to get to my different classes and stuff and at that time I was still walking but I would walk slow and they would give me permission to get out of my class 5 minutes earlier to get to my next class. So I would have 2 of my friends that were able to get out of class 5 minutes early to come get me and walk with me to my next class. Of course they loved that too. As I was walking to my next class down the hall they would stand on either side of me and if the bell would ring you know kids come out of class and they run, they're charging. I can remember a couple of times when they would run by me and bump me as I was walking and my friends would really be very upset about it and make sure that they told them about it. But I can never really remember too much of kids making fun because I see it today where, you know, sometimes you will see someone making fun but I can never really remember that too much when I was a kid of having anybody make fun of me.

Interviewer: Who has made the biggest impression on your life?

Guy: Biggest impression on my life - probably my mom. Great lady and very dedicated, very loyal, very supportive. She always puts other people before her. And I think that she brought me up right and I learned a lot from her. To always care about the other person. And that's what I've done. I'd say I've been very blessed with the support that I've had from my family and my friends. I've had some of the best friends. Back in maybe 82... 82, 83-ish I was always a big fan of style magazines like GQ and that sort of thing. So I've always been into dressing up and, you know, that sort of thing. And I was into pictures and I ended up going to the Barbazon School of Modeling and did some modeling from the waist up for some years. And then I got involved with the Pittsburgh Film Workers Association. Nancy Mosser who I met through them and any time they needed a call for extras or whatever they would call me and whenever a movie was being filmed here in Pittsburgh that's how I was able to do some extra work in the movie *House Guest* and *Striking Distance* and *Only You*.

I've had the opportunity to see a lot of the major league ballparks and I'm always looking at accessibility when I go into other ballparks. I've been to Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Denver, St. Louis, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia.

Interviewer: Do you fly?

Guy: Yes.

Interviewer: How does that work for you?

Guy: It used to be a lot easier than it is now. Physically to get on a plane and get off isn't real easy. I would hope that in years to come that it will become easier for someone with a disability that's in a wheelchair to get on and off a plane. When you get on the plane

you have to get out of your chair, you have to get into a straight back chair, you've got to squeeze down the center of the aisle. It's not real easy. It used to be a lot easier for me 20 years ago when I first started but it gets difficult every year. My biggest nightmare is having my electric wheelchair get to its destination and not work. Because it is always in the back of your mind, "What are they going to do to my chair when they put it on the plane?" First of all you have to have dry cell batteries; you don't want to have wet cell because they don't want to have anything with acid that's going to spill. And they want to disengage or disconnect the wires to the motor which isn't a big deal because they can always just hook it right back up when you get there. But whenever they get you on a plane you've got to get into a straight back chair, they get you on the plane and they take your wheelchair and they put it under the plane. But, you know, the guys throwing it on and off, you don't know how much of a beating it's taking. So that's always my biggest fear but, thank God, I've never had a problem when I've gotten there. I always go through Wheelchair Getaways and we rent a van in whatever city we go to so we have transportation when we are there.

Interviewer: You work out of your home.

Guy: I do a lot of stuff from home here. Got my computer and my fax machine and my phone so I have everything here and if I have to go out on meetings to meet with companies about sponsorships for Muscle Team or my Pirate sales I can do that too. I really enjoy sales. I think that either you have a knack for something and I think that was my knack in life to be a salesman. I enjoy meeting different people and that's a big part of it and I've been a big baseball fan since I was nine. I remember going to Three Rivers Stadium to see Willie Stargell, Al Oliver and Roberto Clemente. I enjoy helping the community and helping kids and that's why I got involved in the MDA with the Muscle Team Event and my golf outing because I want to give back. I feel that life's been good to me and I've been blessed and hopefully I'll be remembered for somebody that cared about the community and other people and that I've done a lot of good things.