

PARATRACKS

Newsletter of Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba Inc.

Emilee's Wish



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825 Sherbrook Street
Winnipeg MB R3A 1M5

Tel: 204-786-4753
Fax: 204-786-1140
Toll-free: 1-800-720-4933
(within Manitoba only)
Email: info@scimanitoba.ca
Website: www.scimanitoba.ca

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*SCI Manitoba extends its sympathies
to the families of the following loved
ones who recently passed away:*

Beatrice Godin

Fleurian Lizotte

Mark Wilson

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Mitch Podolak

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WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK

What would you like to see in future issues of ParaTracks ?

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interest to you, our members. To ensure we continue with
this practice, we need your help. Without feedback from
SCI Manitoba members, we can't always be sure that
we're providing you with the information you require.

Please take a moment to provide us with your feedback.
Was there an article that was of great interest to you?
What did you like about this issue of ParaTracks? What
didn't you like?

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Emilee's Wish

By Kelly Tennant

Since 1983, charitable organization The Dream Factory has dedicated itself to fulfilling ultimate wishes for kids whose lives have been forever altered by chronic health conditions. The Dream Factory is based in Manitoba and all funds raised go towards helping local children and their families have once-in-a-lifetime memorable experiences outside of the hospital environment. Twelve year old Emilee Unger became the newest member of the "Dream Kids" this past month, when she was surprised on the Ace Burpee radio show with the news that the Dream Factory was granting her wish: to meet 17 year old singer-songwriter Billie Eilish.

When I asked her what it was like being on the radio, Emilee said "It was extremely awkward." She wasn't sure why she was there at first. And after Ace, Chrissy, and LTI surprised her with the news that she was going to Vegas to meet Billie Eilish, she didn't want to start crying because she knew she was being filmed for a CTV News segment. "I didn't want to cry on television!" She admits to crying happy tears in the car on the drive home while she, her mom, and her brother stopped for an unconventional celebratory food: McDonald's hash browns.

The first hurdle of the trip was the airplane. "I'm scared of plane rides", Emilee told me. It was her first time flying and she remembers looking around at everything and asking her mom, "How is everyone so calm?!" After surviving the flight, which connected through Vancouver, Emilee and her family finally arrived in Vegas. Her first impression? "It was so hot there. It was +39, with the humidity, it was +41. I was like: how do people live here?!" The trip not only in-

cluded concert tickets to see Billie Eilish, but a whole host of other musicians. The family attended three concerts over the week they spent in Vegas. Emilee went from never having been to a concert in her life to seeing live performances from: Green Day, Cage the Elephant, the Backstreet Boys (Emilee is not a fan. "They sound like Justin Bieber with too much auto-tune"), Miley Cyrus, Camila Cabello, Alicia Keys, Steve Aoki, Marshmello, Kane Brown, Zac Brown Band, and Halsey in addition to the much-anticipated Billie Eilish show.

The day she was scheduled to meet Billie Eilish, she and her family went backstage at the outdoor concert. There was a tent set up and they had to wait a while because it had been specifically arranged for Emilee to meet Billie last

so that they could have a bit more time. "Tori Spelling and her kids were in front of me", Emilee says as if it's nothing unusual to be surrounded by celebrities. Finally, Emilee got to meet Billie. "She's prettier in person. Even before I hugged her, I was teary-eyed. Luckily I wore waterproof mascara!" Billie had read Emilee's story that was submitted to the Dream Factory by her parents

as part of the nomination process. She was just as excited to meet Emilee as Emilee was to meet her. "She knew my name, and my mom's name, and my brother's name, and she knew my dad's name! She gave me a hug, and, yeah, she smelled good."

When asked what she admires most about Billie Eilish, Emilee replied, "She's her own person. There's only one Billie. No one can re-make that. She does her own thing."



Photos provided by Bell Media, used with permission from Kim Swampy and Bell Media Radio Winnipeg.



What's Next? Fitness After Physiotherapy

By Kelly Tennant

One question I hear time and again in my conversations with new members is “What do I do when physio ends?” Unfortunately, the reality is that you can't stay in outpatient physio forever, and one of the goals of your physiotherapist will be to develop an at-home exercise program for you that will ultimately be the basis of your ongoing fitness routine. Generally, people who prioritized fitness prior to acquiring their spinal cord injury will have an easier time returning to fitness, while those who have never worked out before may not even know where to go. I've put together a guide to the most wheelchair-accessible fitness facilities in Winnipeg. With options to fit every budget, there is no excuse not to get out and get active!

Cindy Klassen Recreation Centre, 999 Sargent Avenue

This rec centre is right in the middle of the city and is a great choice, especially for people living in the West End. The facility has a pool and a gym, both of which are wheelchair-accessible. Since it is a City of Winnipeg facility, they offer a fee subsidy, based on household income (application forms can be picked up at the front desk or at

- 8-10 wheelchair accessible cardio machines for upper-body workouts, including SCIFIT ergometer and Nu Step machines
- Staff are available to assist with using the machines

Sergeant Tommy Prince Place (formerly North Centennial), 90 Sinclair Street

Another rec centre in the heart of the city and a great choice for people living in the North End. This facility has an accessible pool and gym, and won the City of Winnipeg Accessibility Award in 2010, after extensive renovations. It is a City of Winnipeg facility, offering a fee subsidy to those who qualify (see the front desk for an application form). There is no added cost for your support person

Pool features:

- Ramp into the pool
- A limited number of water wheelchairs are available for use



- 4 speciality change rooms (including 1 equipped with a lift – bring your own sling)

Gym features:

- Free weights
- Wheelchair accessible resistance weight training and cardio machines

St. James Assiniboia Centennial Rec Centre, 644 Parkdale Street

This rec centre, located in the far west end of the city, features an accessible pool and gym. As another City of Winnipeg facility, users can apply for a fee subsidy by asking for an application at the front desk and there is no extra cost for your support person.

Pool features:

- Chair lift into the pool
- Staff will assist with using the lift, but you will have to transfer independently or with the help of your support



winnipeg.ca/feesubsidy). You are welcome to bring a support person at no added cost if you need assistance with dressing, transferring, or using the equipment.

Pool features:

- 3 stationary chair lifts, one in each area of the pool (shallow end, lap pool, deep end)
- Staff will assist with using the lifts, but you will have to transfer independently or with the help of your support person

Gym features:

- Elevator to 2nd floor gym
- Indoor track
- Free weights
- 7 weight lifting machines with swing-out seats



person

Gym features:

- Indoor track
- Free weights
- Accessible resistance weight machines with swing-out seats
- Accessible cardio machines including:
- SCIFIT Pro Ergometer, Stair Master Air Fit UB, 2 Nu Step T5XR machines

Reh-Fit Centre, 1390 Taylor Avenue

The Reh-Fit Centre is one of two Certified Medical Fitness Facilities in Winnipeg. They offer a variety of perks above and beyond what you will find at the city facilities, including access to their in-house dietitians, physiotherapists, personal trainers, and massage therapists at discounted rates. An introductory coaching session and health assessment are included with your membership. Financial assistance is available, on a sliding scale, based on household income (speak with Member Services for more details).



Their no-charge “buddy system” allows you to bring a support person to help you with dressing, transfers, or using the equipment.

Gym features:

- Indoor track
- Free weights
- Variety of resistance weight machines with swing-out seats
- Rope pulling machine with no seat
- Accessible cardio machines including:
 - ◊ Arm ergometers (1 with no seat)
 - ◊ 6 Nu Step machines (plus attachments to stabilize legs)
- Variety of chair or gentle group fitness classes

- Specialized programs (e.g. Active for Life, an 8 week introduction to exercise program that is suitable for wheelchair users, or Pathways to Fitness, which requires some ability to stand unassisted for short periods)

Wellness Institute at Seven Oaks Hospital, 1075 Leila Avenue

The Wellness Institute is Winnipeg’s other Certified Medical Fitness Facility. Like the Reh-Fit Centre, members have access to in-house dietitians, physiotherapists, personal trainers, and massage therapists. All new members start with a personal consultation with a Wellness Consultant who can help set up an initial exercise plan. They also offer free equipment orientations where a Consultant can demonstrate how to use the equipment as well as any accessibility features. Promotional discounts on memberships run throughout the year, and you are always welcome to bring a support person at no cost.

Pool features:

- Ramp into the pool



- Two water wheelchairs available on a first-come, first-served basis
- Accessible family locker rooms (including 1 equipped with a lift)

Gym features:

- Indoor track
- Free weights
- Resistance bands
- Pulse Fitness Systems resistance equipment with swing-out seats, including machines for: shoulder press, bicep curl, chest press, lat pulldown, triceps extension, row, and chest fly
- Four functional training pods with pulley systems
 - ◊ Two Atlantis NM-200 Functional Training System pods and two Matrix Functional Training System pods (Assistance may be required to lower the pul-



leys or change attachments if they are set too high to reach)

- Accessible cardio machines including:
 - ◇ 3 arm ergometers
 - ◇ Several Nu Step machines
- Variety of chair or gentle group fitness classes
- Specialized programs (e.g. Active for Life, an 8 week introduction to exercise program that is suitable for wheelchair users, or Pathways to Fitness, which requires some ability to stand unassisted for short periods)

First Steps Wellness Centre, 17 Muir Road

The newest rehabilitation-based fitness facility in Winnipeg is First Steps Wellness Centre, which opened in August. First Steps offers intensive exercise-based rehabilitation programs, which are customized to an individual's requirements, level of injury, and rehabilitation goals. Program participants work with kinesiologists who are trained to work specifically with people with spinal cord injuries.

First Steps is home to some very specialized pieces of re-



habilitation and exercise equipment:

- SCI Fit Pro 1: This versatile, highly adjustable upper body exerciser can be used seated or standing.
- LiteGait: a gait training device that simultaneously controls weight bearing, posture, and balance over a treadmill or over ground. It creates an ideal environment for treating patients with a wide range of impairments and functional levels.
- LiteGait provides proper posture, reduces weight bearing, eliminates concerns for balance, and facilitates the training of coordinated lower extremity movement
- FES Bike (Functional Electrical Stimulator): The RT300 product line incorporates functional electrical stimulation (FES) integrated with task specific or motor assistance/resistance activities to optimize therapeutic

goals.

- Specialized software provides real-time biofeedback, data tracking and sophisticated control algorithms that are designed for a wide range of neurological impairments.
- Evolve standing frame: The EasyStand Evolv is the most supportive and comfortable sit-to-stand standing frame available, with over 60 options and configurations.
- Power Plate: With the most precise repetition in its category, Power Plate provides superior stimulation to the neuromuscular system.

Options if you need a little motivation:

For most of us, keeping on a consistent exercise schedule is difficult without some external motivation. This is the best part of physiotherapy; your physiotherapist tells you what exercises to do, how much weight, how many repetitions, and pushes you to keep expanding the limits of what you're capable of. But how do you replicate this outside of the hospital? You have a few options:

- Find a workout buddy and keep each other accountable
 - ◇ Cost = free
- Join group fitness classes (instructors are happy to adapt the classes for wheelchair users – just ask!)
 - ◇ Cost = approximately \$15 per class, depending on facility
 - ◇ There are usually discounts for bulk class passes
- Hire a personal trainer
 - ◇ Cost = anywhere from \$30 to \$120 per hour
 - ◇ Make sure they are certified by a quality organization such as:
 - ◇ Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP)
 - ◇ National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM)
 - ◇ American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)
 - ◇ National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA)
 - ◇ National Federation of Personal Trainers (NFPT)
 - ◇ National Fitness Leadership Association (NFLC)
 - ◇ Manitoba Fitness Council (MFC)
- Work with an athletic therapist or community-based physiotherapist
 - ◇ Cost = approximately \$90-120 for an initial assessment, \$60-80 for subsequent sessions
 - ◇ Many extended health benefits plans offer some coverage



New Kid In Town!

By Bernie Gaudet

Manitoba Adaptive Leisure and Sport is a relatively new non-profit organization founded by Kerri McKee and Jim Harris. Their goal is to provide inclusive social and sporting opportunities for adults facing mobility challenges. Kerri McKee recently came in to visit the SCI Manitoba office and do this interview.

SCI-MB: *Hi Kerri and welcome to SCI Manitoba. For starters, can you give the readers a bit of background about yourself?*

KM: Well, I'm happy to say that I'm 51 years old and recently retired. I'm a left above the knee amputee for the last five years. Two years previous to that, I was dealing with a giant-cell tumour just below the knee cap that just kept coming back. Finally I decided to just let it go. With everything going on with technology these days, it's turned out to be the best decision ever. Here I am now, super busy with everything that I do – I don't let anything stop me. I've damaged my hardware (prosthetic), my knee and my ankle many times over. I have an Ottobock X3 for my knee and it just came back from the shop because I broke the titanium frame.

SCI-MB: *How did you and Jim decide to create this group?*

KM: Jim is also a lower limb amputee. Originally, we set out to create this group for lower limb amputees but then decided to open it up to any adult with a physical disability because it all boils down to the same common core issue. People with a disability, regardless of their age, go through phases of, you know, I'm sick, I can't do anything. They become housebound, afraid to go outside, and they start to lose their friends because of this. It's not their own fault, but because a lot times you don't see anyone that's in a similar boat. You go to these clinics and there's no interaction with other amputees or others with a disability. You're usually by yourself in the waiting room, you go in to see the doctor or the specialist, and then you leave. You never really get to see other people who are similar to you. Even when I go to the amputee clinic there's usually just me. I hear other people in the rooms around me, but I don't actually see anybody. There's never really interaction. I understand it, people want their privacy, but this lack of interaction can contribute to social isolation.

The group was started to get people up and out – to the best of their ability. For me, I can switch between using my crutches, as I am today, using my wheelchair if the occasion calls for it, or I can use my prosthetic leg.

Like today, I have a big blister where my leg would attach, so to prevent infection, I'll be using my crutches or wheels until that heals up. If I'm lazy I'll wheel around, if not, I'll use my crutches.

I was a police officer before this happened. I was with the RCMP for 29 years before retiring. I was very physically active before this all started. I was still able to achieve my physical goals while I was enduring all of my surgeries because it was the only thing keeping me sane at the time. Even now, wherever I go, I'm usually the only one with a visible physical disability. Except for today! I was swimming this morning in Steinbach and there was a guy in power wheelchair. And he was swimming because he likes the feeling of freedom he gets by being in the water.

Also, I'm a big fan of dragon boating and I was in Bemidji, North Dakota. There was a girl there who lost her leg below the knee in a car accident. She met with me and gave me a big hug and I didn't even know who this girl was! She said she'd seen me around before but didn't know me. After her accident, she told me she thought she was done with life. This year she was in the boat dragon boating with her team. She just wanted to thank me for having shown me that life was still possible even after a traumatic injury. Now she's doing pretty much everything she was doing before. And I didn't even do anything! Just the fact that I was doing what I like to do was enough. It doesn't hurt that I pretty much don't care what other people might think of me. Why would I live my life according to their rules when it's my life? So, I have a lot of people in the sports that I do saying things like, "Are you really sure you should be doing this?" My answer is, "Well, why not?" Sometimes I don't know if I can or can't do something. I won't know if I don't try. Then I might find out that I might need to modify the activity, or use some adaptive equipment to make it more possible. So that's what I do. That's probably how I broke the titanium frame on my Ottobock – I went mountain climbing.

I'm not planning on being a role





model for anyone; I'm just living my life. But simply being active, and visible, in the community is enough to be a role model for many people. I always hate it when people say, "Oh, you're so brave". No, I'm not, I'm just living my life. I'm doing the same thing as any able-bodied person. I get up in the morning, make breakfast, get ready for work. Just because I'm missing part of my leg doesn't make me any different.

I try to encourage other people to go and give things a try. A big issue for amputees is that they don't want anyone to see their injury; body image, in other words. After one surgery I had over 300 hundred staples in my leg, tubes hanging out every which way. But after I was all healed up I went away on holiday. So there I was, on a beach, in a bikini, with a Frankenstein leg, and I didn't care what other people thought.

SCI-MB: *Yes, body image is a factor in re-engaging with the community at large for many people. We see every day in the media, social media, everywhere – to be successful and have a fulfilling life; you have to look a certain way. Because someone is in a wheelchair, or has some other visible disability, they are confronted with negative stereotypes – “You can't do this, or you shouldn't do that.”*

KM: As soon as I hear anything like that I go out to prove them wrong – like it's a dare!

SCI-MB: *So, what population is your group geared to serve?*

KM: We're looking at anyone who is over 18 years of age. Of course, we do tend to focus on 30 years and up because if you're in your thirties and you're hit with a disability, it's a lot harder to bounce back than if you're younger. When you're older, we've found that people tend to become more isolated. They're more concerned about their body image, and they're afraid. I have a friend who is an above the knee amputee and no one has ever seen her amputated leg – ever! She's the same as I am now and she's had this since she was a young girl. She's asked me how I can go to the pool and swim. For me, as I said before, I don't care what other people think and I like to swim. I used to live near Concordia Pool. I went there one day in my wheelchair. A new person was working that day and approached me, "Do you need help? Can I get someone to help you?" Meanwhile, the life guard is cracking up in the background and told the new person that I was the best swimmer they had in the pool! But because I was in a wheelchair, that person assumed that I need all kinds of help. I'm also a First Nations woman. People see me: brown skin, in a wheelchair - I must be poor, diabetic, all this other stuff. I have to take the bus from time to time if my car is in the shop, or whatever, and the bus driver will say to me, "Where in the North End

are you going?" So, because I'm brown and have this disability, I have to deal with a lot of stereotypes. This again makes me strive to make a point of, "I'll show you!"

Being a First Nations woman, I've had to deal with stereotypes all my life, which probably helped me in dealing with these kinds of stereotypes when I became permanently disabled because I've already had this kind of experience. I've learned that as long as you live your life by other people's standards, you're never going to get anywhere. I go to visit new amputees all of the time. The best advice I can give to anyone is that you are only going to be as disabled as you make yourself to be.

SCI-MB: *What types of activities does this group do?*

KM: On the leisure side of things we've gone out as a group to see live bands, and gone to the casino to see a show or just play some slots. We've also gone to play cards at Across the Board (a local business where people can gather to play an assortment of card and board games). Sometimes a group will just meet up for coffee, which gives people the opportunity to talk a little bit more and get to know each other's goals, struggles, challenges. As a group we can also talk about disability issues such as how many businesses in the city are inaccessible. For example, some businesses will say they're accessible but they still have a one inch threshold at the entrance. They don't realize that for a power chair this can make a difference. Even for a person with balance issues this can be a big trip hazard.

I like to write accessibility reviews on travel websites and I often get responses from potential travellers thanking me because I've pointed out both the good and the bad of different locations. If nobody says anything nothing gets done. I love being that person who speaks up.

Sportswise, there's swimming (my husband was an Olympian swimmer back in the day). He's a coach who won't teach you how to swim but will teach you how to adapt to your ability and become comfortable in the water. Other sports include

sit volleyball; possibly rock climbing, and the adaptive ski program out of Windsor Park Golf Course. It will depend on who joins the group and





what ideas might come up. Also, as much as we can, we're trying to keep costs low for participants.

We're not going to say no to anyone, no matter the level of their physical disability – even to their caregivers if they need to bring them along.

SCI-MB: What are the goals for this group? What would you like to see happen in the future?

KM: When we started out, we had the goal of planning one activity per week. Hopefully, if we get enough people involved we can diversify. It would be nice to eventually have enough people to lead different groups in different activities on their own.

The real goal is just to get people up, out and active again. Sometimes people don't realize that, with some simple adaptation, they can do a lot more than they think

they can. Sometimes they need people who've experienced similar challenges to teach them those skills and ways to adapt to their specific circumstances. If you're surrounded by people who don't know what to do, or who are unable to get over their grief and negativity after acquiring an injury, it's easy to then give up altogether. I guess it's about normalizing people's lives again so they can see what's possible and move forward.

Anyone interested in more information, or to join Manitoba Adaptive Leisure and Sport, can contact,

Jim Harris: 204-510-8542

Kerri McKee: 204-818-6767

You can also find them on Facebook and Meetup Winnipeg.

Man of the People

by Rob Williams, Winnipeg Free Press

Mitch Podolak attended his final music workshop Sunday.

The 71-year-old, whose legacy includes co-founding the Winnipeg Folk Festival and the West End Cultural Centre, died of complications from septic shock after witnessing one more jam by local musicians and family members in his hospital room.

"We played some songs for him. It was *Bright Morning Star* I learned from (British folk act) the Oysterband. I sang him that and he was gone," said his son Leonard Podolak.

It was a fitting tribute for a man who dedicated his life to fostering an environment where musicians and music fans could connect.

"He uplifted hundreds, created work for thousands and created joy for millions," Leonard said.

Mitch Podolak was born in Toronto on Sept. 21, 1947, the youngest of three children. His clarinet-playing, classical-music-loving father died when he was nine, and he was raised by his mother, sister Alice and brother Mark.

His life and political views changed when Alice took him to see folk musician Pete Seeger at Massey Hall when he was 13, Leonard said.

"He saw Pete Seeger play and the next day he bought a banjo and became a communist," Leonard said with a laugh.

He ran a coffeeshop in Toronto and famously turned Neil Young down for a gig because he said he couldn't sing. ("That was one of his mistakes," Leonard said.) He headed west to set up a chapter of the Young Socialist Alliance in the late 1960s.

Podolak made radio documentaries for CBC, and he and his wife, Ava Kobrinsky, moved to Winnipeg in the early 1970s, about the time the city was looking for

projects to fund as part of its centennial celebrations.

In 1974, Podolak and partner Colin Gorrie got \$77,000 from various levels of government to stage the Winnipeg Centennial Folksong Festival at Birds Hill Park in August. The free event featured 42 artists, with headliners including Bruce Cockburn, Leon Redbone and Murray McLauchlan.

"This weekend you can hear music of the southern Appalachians, of the Canadian Prairies, of the New Orleans honky tonks, of the big cities, of the Irish revolutionaries, of the East Coast fisherman, of farmers and hoboos, rich men and fools and of many of the people that make this world what it is," Podolak and Gorrie wrote in the festival program.

Podolak would stay with the organization, which became the Winnipeg Folk Festival, until 1986.

"He wanted to make the world a better place," said Leonard, 44. "The folk festival was a tool of that, that way he could create a utopia one weekend at a time with folk music at the centre."

The event served as a template for numerous other festivals in North America, and Podolak went on to help found the Vancouver Folk Festival.

"Folk festivals are uniquely special communities with a lot of heart and a huge reliance on volunteers. It really takes a village to build a folk festival and they've all developed that way because of the model that Mitch created," Winnipeg Folk Festival executive director Lynne Skromeda said.

"He was a mentor and he was a friend, to me and to the organization as a whole. He will always be a part of us and what we create in Birds Hill Park for every year to come. We love him and will miss him greatly."

Podolak's next local passion project was the renovation of a former church at the intersection of Ellice Ave-



nue and Sherbrook Street, which opened as the West End Cultural Centre in 1987, and continues as a live-music venue to this day.

"The people who tell me their stories about putting up the drywall at the West End, who were painting the walls minutes before the doors opened for the first time, all speak as though they can't believe it actually happened and continues to happen. There's something very special about that," said Jason Hooper, the West End Cultural Centre's executive director.

In 2007, Podolak started the house-concert touring circuit Home Routes as a way to provide musicians with more opportunities to perform across the country, including in small towns without any music venues.

"It's such a simple idea: we give people 12 gigs in 14 days, everybody puts them up and feeds them, so performers go home with money and they can buy groceries and pay their rent," he told the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 2010.

The project was a natural extension of who he was, said Leonard, who, inspired by his father, went on to become a musician, playing in bands such as the Juno Award-winning/Grammy nominated traditional group the Duhks, and now runs Home Routes.

"That was just the kind of stuff he would do: help foster the community of folk music. It's a tribe that exists globally, and folk music is a function of a goal of making the world a better place and championing human beings, the environment, sustainability and justice," he said.

Podolak put his organizational skills to work for various causes over the years, raising money for American folk legend Utah Phillips with a benefit show in 2007 when the musician couldn't tour anymore owing to congestive heart failure.

In about 1990, according to testimony during the inquiry into David Milgaard's wrongful conviction, Podolak helped Joyce Milgaard write and record a song about her son's case, which was sent to the justice minister.

"He got a posse of Winnipeg musicians together behind Joyce Milgaard and they had a press conference at the West End Cultural Centre and got some press," Leonard said. "It was picked up by *Now* magazine in Toronto and made national news."

The impact Podolak had on the community was evident when he needed help.

In 2016, he fell and sustained an injury that required him to undergo surgery on his cervical vertebrae. He needed to use a wheelchair following the surgery, so the initial plan was to retrofit his two-storey Wolseley home.

Local musician Heather Bishop set up a GoFundMe campaign with the goal of raising \$20,000 — an amount the fund raised in one day.

"That's the kind of guy Mitch was. He gave everything he had to the music business, so when he was in

trouble, he had no backup, and I knew that," Bishop said. "And I also knew that if people knew he needed help, they'd be there. And in an instant we raised 40-some-thousand dollars."

Retrofitting the house proved unrealistic, so the money was used to help fund a condo where Podolak and Kobrinsky had been living until Podolak was hospitalized last month.

His work earned him accolades from every corner of society. In 2015, he was made a member of the Order of Manitoba; the same year, he received an honorary doctor of laws from Brandon University.

In 2013, he was recognized with a lifetime achievement honour, the Unsung Hero Award, from the Canadian Folk Music Awards.

"Mitch was a giant figure, and the swath he left was so huge; you would be hard-pressed to find a folk musician in this country who was not at least influenced by him, if not absolutely helped," Bishop said.

As helpful as he was to the artists, he could also rub some people the wrong way with his straightforward manner, Leonard said.

"He was one of a kind and they don't make them like that anymore... but he wasn't perfect. He pissed off a lot of folks. His brashness didn't always serve him. He was so stuck by his principles. If he lost some rich person's money, he was, 'Oh well, he was rich,' instead of 'Oh well, too bad it didn't work out,'" Leonard said with a laugh.

"His vision of socialism and his vision of communism — I guess people would refer to it as the ideal way of looking at it — is we have enough resources for everybody, so if we could ensure everyone was educated and had health care and we lifted up everyone, we all as individuals would flourish. It's rise up instead of trickle down."

Podolak's family — which includes Zeke and Max Preston, the sons of a close childhood friend whom he and Kobrinsky took in after her death — is in the process of organizing a memorial service for family and friends, and are exploring the idea of holding a larger community celebration of life that anyone could attend.

"He's going to be here forever," Leonard said. "Everybody has a Mitch story and the community he created around him." — *with files from Erin Lebar and Jen Zoratti*. Story Credit: Winnipeg Free Press
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Mitch Podolak shows off the poster for the first festival that would eventually become the Winnipeg Folk Festival. (Photo Credit: Joe Bryksa / Winnipeg Free Press)



MANITOBA PARAPLEGIA FOUNDATION INC. (MPF) NEWS

MPF funds go to work in four main areas that are not supported by any other sources in Manitoba: special projects, product testing, research and direct aid to persons with spinal cord injuries who do not have the necessary financial resources for equipment and/or services. All requests for direct aid are initiated through SCI Manitoba. Individuals must provide information on their financial status, explain why they cannot meet the expense within their own budget, and identify any other potential sources to support the request including potential for contribution from family.

SCI Manitoba thanks MPF for its continued support to improving the quality of life of persons with spinal cord injury.

MPF has approved several requests for financial support during the past several months. Since the last issue of ParaTracks, financial support totalling \$25,650.97 has been granted. Some of the highlights follow:

- Financial support was provided for the building of ramps outside two SCI Manitoba member's homes. These ramps will enable each member to safely and independently access their home and return to their communities.
- Funding was provided to cover the costs of assessments for three SCI Manitoba members to assist them with career exploration and vocational plans. The assessments will provide insight regarding academic potential, interests and work environment that best fit their personalities.
- Funding was granted for the purchase of a van lift for an SCI Manitoba member's van. The lift will allow the member's continued use of their van, along with the freedom, and flexibility this provides, while at the same time, minimizing the risk of shearing and skin breakdown during transfers in and out of their van.

- Financial assistance was granted for hand controls for an SCI Manitoba member's vehicle. This will allow the member the ability to drive and therefore participate more fully in all aspects of family life as well as offer them the independence to attend events and appointments on their own.
- Financial support was provided for the purchase of a ROHO cushion for an SCI Manitoba member. The properly inflated cushion will ensure the member's pressure ulcer does not increase in size or severity.
- Funding was granted for the purchase of a platform lift for two SCI Manitoba member's homes. These lifts will allow each member safe and independent access into their homes.
- Funding was provided for the purchase of a shower commode chair for an SCI Manitoba member. This chair will allow the member to have access and be able to bathe fully and potentially independently. This chair will also allow the member more independence in bowel and bladder management as they could potentially transfer independently and self-propel.

Visit MPF's website at:

www.scimanitoba.ca/mpf. Applications for assistance are available through the website or by contacting the office at: info@scimanitoba.ca or 204-786-4753.

MPF Trustees:

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Feeling trapped this winter? Why not escape!

By Kelly Tennant

Escape rooms, live-action games where a team of players discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks together with the goal of “escaping” the room before time runs out, are a new obsession for many people. Have you been interested in checking one out but wondered about their accessibility? A member recently shared with me that he and his wife have been taking the initiative to check out the local escape rooms and have found many of them to be very accommodating to him and his wheelchair, so I went on a fact-finding mission to unlock the puzzle surrounding Manitoba’s escape rooms. Here are some clues to improve your chances of outsmarting the cold this winter:

Winnipeg locations:

- **Time Lapse Escape Rooms**
 - ◇ 654 King Edward St.
 - ◇ 204-487-2262
 - ◇ timelapseescape.com
 - ◇ info@timelapseescape.com
 - ◇ Groups of 4-8 players
 - ◇ \$25 per person (taxes included)
 - ◇ 2 wheelchair accessible rooms: The Warlock’s Curse and Gold Rushed
 - ◇ A new wheelchair accessible room is being built!
- **Enigma Escapes**
 - ◇ Unit 4 – 980 Lorimer Blvd. (off Sterling Lyon Parkway)
 - ◇ 204-219-0014
 - ◇ enigmaescapes.com
 - ◇ info@enigmaescapes.com
 - ◇ Groups of 4-8 players recommended, but can play with 2 players
 - ◇ \$23.81 per person, \$100 room minimum (2 player groups must pay the minimum)
 - ◇ The Lost Jewel of Zanzibar is completely accessible and there is an accessible washroom on-site
- **The Real Escape**
 - ◇ 3137 Portage Ave
 - ◇ 204-615-7717
 - ◇ therealescape.ca
 - ◇ info@therealescape.ca
 - ◇ Groups of 4-14 players
 - ◇ \$22 per person (taxes included)
 - ◇ Children 5 and under are free with the minimum number of paid admissions
 - ◇ 2 wheelchair accessible rooms: Abandoned Sta-

tion and Nuclear Meltdown

- **Next Level Escapes**
 - ◇ 390 Provencher Blvd, Unit F
 - ◇ 204-414-2622
 - ◇ nextlevelescapes.ca
 - ◇ hello@nextlevelescapes.ca
 - ◇ Groups of 3-7 players
 - ◇ \$15-25 per person
 - ◇ All 3 of their rooms are accessible
 - ◇ Clues are in English and French
 - **Get Out! Escape Rooms**
 - ◇ 420 Des Meurons Street
 - ◇ 204-231-4903
 - ◇ getoutescaperooms.com
 - ◇ info@getoutescaperooms.com
 - ◇ Groups of 2-10 players
 - ◇ \$25-\$35 per person, depending on group size
 - ◇ Children 9 or under are free and don’t count towards group size
 - ◇ All rooms are accessible. Some rooms may require one group member to take a step up or reach up or down.
 - **Mask Escapes**
 - ◇ 25 Scurfield Blvd, Unit 7
 - ◇ 204-202-3800
 - ◇ maskescapes.com
 - ◇ info@maskescapes.com
 - ◇ Groups of 2-10 players
 - ◇ \$25 per person (taxes included)
 - ◇ 2 wheelchair accessible rooms: Roll the Bones and Global Human Extinction
- ## Outside Winnipeg:
- **Steinbach Adrenaline Escapes**
 - ◇ Unit 3 – 227 Main St., Steinbach
 - ◇ 204-380-4799
 - ◇ adrenalineescapes.com
 - ◇ info@adrenalineescapes.com
 - ◇ Groups of 2-8 players
 - ◇ \$20-50 per person, \$100 room minimum
 - ◇ 2 wheelchair accessible rooms: Spy Games and Baker Street Mystery
 - **Elevaro Escape Rooms**
 - ◇ 586 Main St., Winkler
 - ◇ 204-362-2914
 - ◇ elevaroescape.com
 - ◇ echozar@icloud.com
 - ◇ Groups of 4-10 players, or up to 20 for the duel room
 - ◇ \$120 for up to 6 people, \$150 for 7-8 people, additional \$20 per person over 8 people



- ◇ All 5 rooms are wheelchair accessible, except for a couple of smaller secondary spaces.
- **Brandon Escape The Final Countdown**
 - ◇ 731 Princess Ave, Brandon
 - ◇ 204-727-2203
 - ◇ thefinalcountdown.ca
 - ◇ escape@thefinalcountdown.ca
 - ◇ Groups of 2-12 players
 - ◇ \$25 per person (taxes included)
 - ◇ Children under 10 are free as long as you meet the room minimum of paying players
 - ◇ The first clue is free but for every additional clue they suggest a \$5 donation to a local charity or non-profit organization!
- ◇ 4 rooms on-site plus a variety of portable escape rooms
- **Station X Escape Rooms**
 - ◇ 111 Broadway Street North, Deloraine
 - ◇ 204-747-3913
 - ◇ stationxescaperooms.com
 - ◇ station.x.mb@gmail.com
 - ◇ Groups of 2-6 players
 - ◇ \$20 per person
 - ◇ Rooms are updated frequently and some are wheelchair accessible. Ask when booking!

2019 Merit Award Recipient Patricia Bonas

In 1965 Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba Inc. (formerly CPA) initiated the presentation of the Merit Award. This award provides SCI Manitoba with an opportunity to give formal, public recognition to either organizations or individuals, for their outstanding accomplishments and their contributions in support of individuals with spinal cord injuries. The Merit Award is presented each year at SCI Manitoba's Annual General Meeting. The presentation includes a plaque presentation to the recipient as well as having their name engraved along with previous recipients on a permanent Merit Award Plaque that is proudly displayed in the SCI Manitoba Office.

At SCI Manitoba's Annual General Meeting on June 18, 2019, Art Braid, SCI Manitoba Board Member, presented the 2019 Merit Award to Dieter Bonas on behalf of his wife Patricia (Patti) Bonas who passed away on February 28, 2019. Dieter accepted a plaque on behalf of Patricia for *"her legacy of dedication and commitment in supporting persons with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities to achieve greater independence, self-reliance and full community participation."*

Please read on for Art's full presentation.

"I have been given the honour of

making the presentation of the 2019 Award of Merit to someone whom I have known and respected for more than forty years. This year's recipient, Patti Bonas, as you are aware, passed away far too soon earlier this year. It is regretted that although this Award was earned by her years ago, it was not given when she could be here in person to receive it.

Patti suffered a devastating spinal cord injury at age 14 when she dove into a swimming pool. Fortunately she still had the use of her arms. She had a role model as a wheelchair user in her uncle Norm Paisley, a fellow polio survivor of mine. I am sure that his example must have encouraged her.

Patti never looked back – she finished her high school and went on to attend University. She obtained employment in an organization as an event planner before the University of Manitoba, recognizing her abilities and charisma, offered her the position of Reservation and Special Events Manager; a position that she filled with great skill and devotion until her retirement.

Throughout her life she had recurring health issues due to her injury. She underwent several operations over the years. All the while she endured these things with a positive attitude that did not give a hint





*Dieter Bonas and SCI Manitoba
Board Member Art Braid*

to others that there was anything amiss. She was loved by her friends, admired by her acquaintances, and respected by those with whom she worked. She married her ping pong coach, Dieter, and their love was symbiotic. Each was stronger for this union.

Before her marriage and after her injury, Patti needed to learn to live independently. She became the first female resident of 1010; blazing the path for others. Indeed, she was even present at the ribbon-cutting opening ceremony. From there she was able to live independently in an apartment. She later served for many years as a member of the Board of 1010 Sinclair Housing Inc. I might, just in passing, mention that she also served as a board member of the Winnipeg Convalescent Home.

In spite of health issues, work, family and social commitments, Patti made time to volunteer her considerable talents to serving the larger community. Her involvement with CPA began when she was quite young, when she received rehabilitation services from the staff. CPA itself became her beneficiary when in 1981 she offered her services to the organization as a member the Board of Directors.

She served as a director for eleven years, giving the Board the perspective of a recent recipient of services and a younger voice that needed to be heard. She was a much valued addition to the Board.

In 1992 Patti retired from the CPA Board but in 2009 she returned to the Board with renewed vigor and added experience. She continued to serve until 2018 when her health began to fail. During those ten years she was an integral part of the Programs Committee that oversaw services and was the perennial chair of the Nominating Committee. She co-chaired CPA's elaborate 60th Anniversary dinner and celebration. She assisted with CPA's contact with patients in the Rehab hospital; sometimes acting as an unofficial peer mentor. Her advice to the Board on all matters of rehabilitation and housing for disabled persons was always relevant and insightful. She even assisted with the SCI MB new website development. I also recall her insisting that I accompany her to visit the Rehab Engineering Department to obtain an understanding of the issues that it was facing; to see if CPA could assist in any way.

A few years ago CPA was concerned about hospital systemic care issues that were affecting adversely the rehabilitation of our members. Patti volunteered to chair a committee of three to investigate and report to the Board on these issues. A seven page Report was prepared that served as a planning blueprint. The Report pinpointed areas of concern about the care and safe discharge practices of persons with spinal cord injuries, and provided concrete examples. This Report was shared with the highest branches of government and was the basis for in-person discussions with the deputy minister. Patti was not a director who just attended Board and Committee meetings, her 21 year involvement extended above and beyond.

It is obvious that the bestowing of this Award of Merit is overdue. We are delighted however that Patti's husband, Dieter, is here with us this evening to accept the Award for her. It is now my pleasure, on behalf of the whole organization, to present this evening, the Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba 2019 Award of Merit honouring our dear friend, Patti Bonas, to her husband Dieter Bonas."



Staff Awards



Ron Burky, Executive Director, presented Service Award plaques and gifts to staff members Laurence Haien, Rehabilitation Counsellor, Vocational Services, Gail Burnside, Rehabilitation Counsellor, Hospital Services and Adrienne Conley, Executive Assistant, at the Annual General Meeting on June 18, 2019.

Laurence and Gail were honoured for 10 years of service while Adrienne was honoured for 25 years of service.

The Beauty of Business

Interview with Cindy Broesky, Owner of 5ive Studio

By Melanie White

M: Please tell our readers a little about yourself.

C: My name is Cindy Broesky and I live in Steinbach, Manitoba. I am thirty-five, a wife, a mother of three kids, and I run a home-based esthetician business. My services include lash extensions (full mink), lash lift and tint, brow shaping/tinting, and body sugaring.

M: Where did you get the idea for your home-based business?

C: I like to pick services that I would use personally. So, when I started looking at what I would enjoy doing I started thinking about the services that I enjoy having done on myself. So, that was kind of how the body sugaring and lash extensions came into the picture.

M: What was your highest level of education before coming into the esthetics business?

C: Before becoming an Esthetician I was actually an

Insurance Broker, so I took my courses through the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba.

M: Were your children a big factor in making the transition from Insurance Broker to Esthetician?

C: They were. After having my first son I decided that I would stay at home, and I was a stay-at-home mom for about five years. I took a long break and when it was kind of getting to the point where I was ready to start working again, I had to make a decision as to what that was going to look like for me... I knew that I wanted to be able to be with them as much as possible and not just be running off to a job every day. I started looking at things that I could do from home, trying to find things that I enjoyed. Also, was there enough supply and demand?

M: Can you tell me about the education that you received in order to do what you're doing now?

C: For the body sugaring I took a course in Winni-



peg and I was certified through them. Then, with the help of the market *Abilities* program***, I flew to Toronto and I was trained at one of the top facilities there for lash extensions.

M: You've established a clientele now and are working a fair amount of hours. How many hours on average do you work per week?

C: I try and cap it at about thirty hours a week but sometimes it's a little bit more depending on the season; obviously with weddings and graduations I end up picking up a few more, but I try and stick to my thirty hours per week.

M: So, this is a very busy time of year for you?

C: It is, definitely. It's fun though. I love working on brides and grads because they want something a little more dramatic and it's enjoyable to try different things.

M: Can you tell me about your spinal cord injury?

C: Sure. When I was seventeen I was in a car accident and that left me with an incomplete spinal cord injury where I had burst fractures through, I believe it was either four or seven vertebra as well as a blood clot in my spinal cord. I was in hospital for about three to four months where I went through the PANSU (Post Acute Neuro Surgery Unit) rehab at Health Sciences Centre, and that's how I became a part of Canadian Paraplegic Association.

M: Do you feel that your spinal cord injury affects the work that you do and, if so, how?

C: Absolutely. It was a big factor in choosing what I wanted to do. I knew that being in an office setting for eight hours, Monday to Friday, and sitting at a desk wasn't going to work for me. I needed to have flexibility to have gaps throughout my day to stretch and make sure that I'm keeping my spine mobile. Also, I know for myself that I need to be able to incorporate exercise to keep my body strong and support my back.

I'm able to wear a brace over my shoulders to pull them back and help support my upper back. My bed is adjustable so that I can raise and lower my clients, according to the services they're getting, to avoid hunching. I like to leave a small break in between clients of about fifteen minutes so that I can stretch and make sure that I'm taking care of myself because that's a really big deal.

M: What advice would you give someone else with a

spinal cord injury that might be thinking of starting their own business?

C: Don't let yourself be limited by it. You need to look at yourself and what you enjoy doing and just realize that you can still do it, there is always a way. Maybe it's doing what I did and making sure that you pick a certain amount of hours and you have breaks in between to stretch. Or, find a job that you love and talk to your employer about accommodations, but definitely don't let it stop you. Where there is a will, there is a way.

M: Looking back to the start of your journey as a business woman who works from home, is there anything that you wish you could change or might have done differently?

C: I think I would have been stricter with my hours... in the beginning you're so excited to have clientele and to have people wanting your services. I definitely, for that first year, probably overdid it and then I kind of reached a point where I was in pain again and I wasn't really taking care of myself. I realized that me overdoing it doesn't help my family and it doesn't help my clients, because eventually I'm going to burn out. So, I wish I had been more set with my hours and a bit more organized in that sense.

M: In terms of future plans for your business, where do you see things going?

C: I'm kind of a dreamer. I recently started selling retail products branded under my company name and they've done well. I just have a lash shampoo right now that I'm doing but I have dreams of growing that side of my business. I'm also looking into taking some more courses this fall and adding a new service, which I'm really excited about. I do dream of opening a commercial location and have staff working under me, possibly a retail side, but I don't know when that will be because I want to make sure I'm not missing crucial stuff in my kids' life right now. Its baby steps, which have actually been really good for me because now I can see: how are the products, like the lash shampoo, are doing? It's doing well, so then the next step would be maybe another type of product and see how things go when I add a new service.

Sometimes having the restrictions, if you want to call them that, is actually a really good thing. I'm the type of person who can go a hundred miles an hour, all in,



and I can bite off more than I can chew. So, having to slow down and take it step-by-step has actually been a good thing for me.

M: In terms of the other aspects of business, the behind the scenes paperwork and that whole piece, did you have any help with that or did you teach yourself along the way?

C: Initially, I did not have any help with that. About three years ago, when I added in the lashes, was when I decided to outsource. I do have someone who takes care of that for me now, just because it's not something that I love. And that was a big step for me, because I'm also someone who likes to be in control and I feel like I can do everything. Realizing that now my business was at a point where I'd rather dedicate my time to my clients and possibly bring in different retail products for them, meant that something had to go- so, it was the bookwork. But before that I did do it on my own.

M: How do you advertise? Do you rely on word of mouth?

C: When I started out five years ago it was strictly Facebook. Instagram wasn't huge yet, but now I've moved more to the Instagram side of things. I'd say that most of my clientele comes from word of mouth; living in a smaller town has been really good for me because I'm not great at the advertisement side of things. I'm trying to post more of my work, but out here people are happy with their services, with the quality of work that I do, and how meticulous I am, that they've just referred their friends and that has helped to keep me going. I'm very grateful for that.

M: So, it sort of takes care of itself in a sense but you use social media as a marketing tool?

C: Yes. I'm noticing, probably over the last two years, social media is huge in business whether you're home-based or commercial. I'd love to even take a course one day and learn all of the algorithms and science behind it because there is so much to know.

M: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your journey that I haven't asked about?

C: Just don't get discouraged. There were so many times, like in the beginning when I first found out what the diagnosis was after my accident, you just think "well, this is it then, this is my life" you know, and it's very easy to get into a limiting mindset. Having the personality that I do, like I said I'm a hundred percent one way or a hundred percent the other, I knew that if I got into that limiting mindset I'd never go anywhere. I really had to dig deep and just say "I'm going to do this"... whether it's the hours of physiotherapy that I went through for years at the hospital or building my business, you just have to really want it bad enough and believe that you can do it.

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ON THE RISE

By Laurence Haien

In the article that follows Shane Hartje talks about his history of self-employment and his most recent business venture.

Could you tell the readers about yourself?

I lived in Winnipeg until I was nine-years-old at which time my family moved to Anola where my parents still live. I've been in Winnipeg most of my adult life, I'm single and have no children. I'm a huge motocross fan, Jets fan and snowmobile a lot in the winter.

Tell me about the onset of your spinal cord injury and how it affects you today.

At the age forty-one, I crashed a dirt bike on a race track and sustained a C-07, complete spinal cord injury. I remained in the Rehabilitation Hospital, Health Sciences Centre for approximately three months. I use a manual wheelchair for mobility. I would say one of my greatest challenges since has been recurring urinary tract infections. I experience heightened neurogenic pain and muscle stiffness when I have a urinary tract infection. This can interfere with my productivity and depending on the severity it can confine me to bed for a couple of days if it's really bad.

Could you provide an overview of your employment history and tell the readers how you became an entrepreneur?

I started my first business when I was fifteen years old. I was enrolled in the Building Construction program in high school and at the end of my first year I started building cedar lawn furniture. At that time my parents didn't have the extra money to buy the thousands of dollars in tools and supplies I needed. We discussed what I wanted to do, and they agreed to purchase everything on their credit card. They told me that I had 30 days to start making money and pay them back or interest would accrue on the card. I did almost \$10,000.00 in sales that first summer and continued building and selling lawn furniture over the next three summers.

When I turned 16 and got my license I started working at Wendy's flipping burgers. After high school graduation, I worked full-time at Palliser Furniture building furniture and working in the shipping department. My goal however was to become a carpenter. At that time there were no apprenticeship opportunities and work in the field was scarce. So, I took random jobs in the construc-

tion industry that involved roofing, framing, dry walling, soffit and fascia installation. I eventually got tired of the go-round: seasonal employment, getting laid off, not making a lot of money and unreliable income.

In 1997, I reconnected with a very close childhood friend and we decided to become business partners. I sold my dirt bike and scraped up some additional money, he borrowed some money from his parents and with just an idea and \$15,000.00, we opened Blaze Internet Services in Oakbank MB: a dial up internet service provider and web hosting company. We placed advertisements in the local papers and a sign on the highway just outside of Winnipeg and we were off!

After about a year or so the business allowed me to cover my rent and pay my bills. The partnership was good. We ran the business for just over three years and built up a base of around almost 700 customers. Although we were in agreement about our direction, we lacked an end goal and just took things as they occurred. Then, high speed internet started to become available in Winnipeg and changed everything. We figured we had better sell our customers before they started making the switch and that's exactly what we did. Prairie Online, a partner of MTS at the time, purchased our customers and we were on to the next chapter.

With Blaze Internet Services sold we decided to open another business in Winnipeg called Clear Concepts. We provided website design, hosting and network management. We had base revenue coming in over the next year but not much additional money. We lived a very spartan existence over the first year. It was a hard lesson; I realized the value the internet service provided in regard to cash flow. We eventually found another partner through our connections. He had more business experience than either of us, brought a client base and some money to the table. Over the course of the next 7 years we built the business up to \$2.5 – \$2.8 million annually; at our peak, we employed 15 – 20 people.

In 2003 while we were still building Clear Concepts we launched another business with several other partners. The company was called Internet Merchants International. The companies focus was to build and market products online. Company's



we marketed everything from flowers, website hosting, sports paraphernalia and even partnered to launch an online pharmacy. Things were really starting to take off for us when Google made some major changes to their search engine and essentially bumped us out of the marketplace. The company continues to exist, and it still generates a very modest income.

Eventually, I began to feel dissatisfied. Although our new partner brought knowledge, contacts, money and a client base, we did not share a common direction, had different views on how to accomplish goals, and were not in agreement on how to divide responsibilities and differing points of view regarding supervision and management of staff. Around 2012 I knew I needed to make a change so I started thinking about the only other thing that I knew how to do well and CompleteMyProject.ca was born. Clear Concepts, with the addition of a few new partners has now grown into one of the leading IT companies in Winnipeg.

Over the years with Clear Concepts I had participated in several business groups and had established many contacts. Additionally, I had a large following on Facebook. Much of the business came by way of referral. I came to feel the construction industry did not hold to the same level of professionalism that I had experienced in the information technology industry. I was determined to establish professionalism in my own company. Eventually, the business grew to three full-time staff and many sub-contractors. By the third year, I had realized nearly \$1 million in sales.

Unfortunately in the 4th year, I broke my back. While in the Rehabilitation Hospital, I worked from my bed and did what I could to keep the business running. I had an employee who was my right-hand-man and who was essential to the business. By the following summer, we had secured a major contract with Ikea. Shortly after that was completed, my main employee secured a full-time, permanent position with the Manitoba Government that included full benefits and a pension. The future of CompleteMyProject.ca became quite precarious.

After my discharge from the Rehabilitation Hospital, I wanted to increase my functional abilities through therapy. I called several clinics and found none of these specialized in working with people with spinal cord injuries. Through further research, I found out about Project Walk which was based in

California, that led me to a franchise in Regina they had rebranded as First Steps Wellness Centre after Project Walk made the decision to change from a charity/non-profit to a for-profit model.

Every treatment I researched for persons with spinal cord injury, including stem cell transplant, required six – twelve months of intensive exercise therapy. Initially, I had not considered buying into the First Steps Wellness Centre, but while I was there in September 2017, CompleteMyProject.ca began to falter. I had to seriously consider my future and I began to ask myself: What would it be like to have First Steps Wellness Centre available in Winnipeg? The more I considered it, First Steps Wellness Centre seemed a natural transition for me. In December 2017, I travelled to Regina, met with the Board of First Steps Wellness Centre, and began negotiations for licensing in Manitoba. I felt that I could really represent the brand well. In July 2018, I purchased the licensing rights to Manitoba, and it's been a serious push to open a facility here in Winnipeg ever since.

What is it like to be your own boss?

It has been so long, I've basically always been my own boss. I have a pretty high tolerance for risk. I think my calculation of risk is different than the calculation that others might make when considering risk. For example, if I believe in a business idea, I do the forecasts and market research to determine if its viable or not. Once the calculations are in place and the numbers work, I don't see it as a risk, just as an opportunity.

What have you learned about business along the way?

I learned the importance of having a documented business plan and the significance of cash flow. In terms of First Steps Wellness Centre, all of my prior business experience revolved around service so the concept of service delivery was not foreign to me. I learned that I had a lot of transferable skills and knowledge relevant for this type of business venture. In my opinion, First Steps Wellness Centre fills a need that is not met locally, and this put us in a very viable position. The goal for all businesses is to become self-sustaining and then profitable, that includes a not-for-profit. Obviously, the structure of a non-profit is different from the companies that I had launched previously. I'm on a learning curve that involves identifying potential donors, approaching donors, and securing financial



and other sources of support. First Steps Wellness Centre will be self-sustaining once we have three full-time therapists.

What qualities and skills does an entrepreneur require?

I think there's some element of luck but, overall, entrepreneurs have to be smart, adaptable, and resilient. They have to recognize opportunity when it presents itself and be quick to seize the opportunity. Having a good accountant or bookkeeper is essential to keep your house in order. By this I mean, payment of taxes, issuance of payroll, source deductions. You never want to end up in a situation where you owe money to government because this brings hefty financial penalties. As I said earlier, you have to have a high tolerance for risk and stress. You have to be resilient and able to let the little things roll off your back. You can't afford to allow the little things to take a notch out of you.

In terms of recruitment, I have interviewed many people over the years. As a result, I have developed good instincts and am able to assess the character of people quickly. You need to ask important questions, such as, Where do you see yourself in five years? If the person says they see themselves as being the lead therapist, this bodes well for First Steps Wellness Centre because I know the person is committed, ambitious and intends to stay.

It's also important to network. One of my biggest influences was a business group I joined many years ago called The Entrepreneur's Organization. The annual membership fee was approximately \$3,000.00 but the benefits were significant. We met monthly, we were placed in forums with peers but never with businesses competitors; the meetings were highly structured. The organization also hosted universities and brought in speakers and provided many educational opportunities for its members. These types of organizations can create a lot of long-term value and the knowledge you can gain from a group peers is invaluable.

What advice would you have for those readers who may be considering opening a business?

Have a business plan. Everyone seems to think a business has to involve doing something that no one has ever done before. Not so. Just find something ideally you enjoy, a product or services that exists but which you feel is under served or perhaps you feel you can do better than what's currently offered.

Shane, thank-you for your time and the insights and knowledge you've shared regarding entrepreneurship. I'm sure the readers who have or are considering self-employment will find the information helpful.

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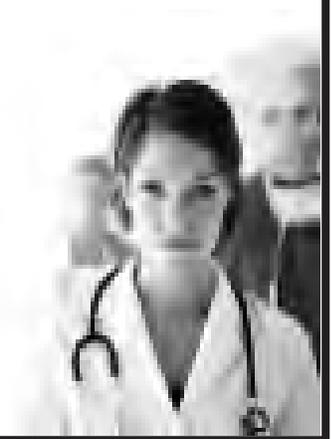
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Ron Burky	Executive Director	rburky@scimanitoba.ca	224
Adrienne Conley	Executive Assistant	aconley@scimanitoba.ca	222
Darlene Cooper	Director of Rehab. Services	djcooper@scimanitoba.ca	225
Denise Balliet	Accounting Officer	dballiet@scimanitoba.ca	221
Kelly Tennant	Rehab. Counsellor, Health Promotion Services	ktennant@scimanitoba.ca	223
Laurence Haien	Sr. Rehab. Counsellor, Vocational Services	lhaien@scimanitoba.ca	234
Melanie White	Rehab. Counsellor, Vocational Services	mwhite@scimanitoba.ca	226
Bernie Gaudet	Rehab. Counsellor, Transitional—Vocational Readiness Services	bgaudet@scimanitoba.ca	227
Maria Cabas	Rehab. Counsellor, Indigenous Services	mcabas@scimanitoba.ca	228
Gail Burnside	Rehab. Counsellor, Hospital Services	gburnside@scimanitoba.ca	229
Artem Dolia	Rehab. Counsellor Assistant	adolia@scimanitoba.ca	232
LéAmber Kensley	Rehab. Counsellor, Indigenous Enhancement Services	lkensley@scimanitoba.ca	204-781-0313
Delcy-Ann Selymes	Rehab. Counsellor	dselymes@scimanitoba.ca	231



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