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THE MAX Challenge of Lewes, SurfGimp Foundation and Scott Chesney transform lives

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BY CAROLINE STREETT

As a means of bringing together the Delaware community, three seemingly different organizations found commonalities in their goals and came together to better the community.

THE MAX Challenge of Lewes, SurfGimp Foundation and motivational speaker Scott Chesney collaborated into one large event of giving April 6, to inspire the community that with a positive mindset and the help of others one can overcome nearly any obstacle.

The SurfGimp Foundation is a nonprofit organization that was born two years ago out of the inspiration and actions of Jay Liesener.

Rendered a quadriplegic at the age of 17, Liesener refused to let his injuries stop him from doing what he wanted to do, which brought about the creation of Team SurfGimp. The team helped him to overcome his disability and do what he loved to do—surf.

Through this team came the creation of the SurfGimp Foundation. The main purpose of the foundation is to give people with disabilities the opportunity to do things they never thought possible because of physical impairments.

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Jay passed away in November of 2017, but his legacy lives on through the initiative of the Surfjimp Foundation to continue and help others.

Widow to Jay and current president of the foundation, Melanie Liesener, explained that her passion for the foundation is driven by her goal to “continue Jay’s legacy.”

Tears welled in her eyes as she looked to the sky to gather her thoughts and emotions and explain what the foundation meant to Jay, and what it means to her.

“Jay’s life was changed forever by Team Surfjimp. He realized that with the help of others he could achieve things that he didn’t think were possible for himself given the limitations from his disability,” Liesener said. “So, not only did it help him breakdown his mental barriers to what he thought he could and couldn’t do, but it also allowed him to set up a network to be able to achieve the things that he didn’t at first think was possible.”

Liesener explained that the idea for the foundation came about when Jay was getting ready to surf for the last time. Team Surfjimp had impacted Jay’s life in such a positive way and he didn’t want it to end with him.



Liesener watched intently as the event opens with a slideshow of the Surfjimp Foundation. *Photo by Caroline Streett.*



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In addition to helping disabled peoples overcome physical barriers, Liesener explained that Jay wanted to go beyond that and also help people with financial barriers, hence the foundation's actions of providing grants for adaptive equipment and the funding of trips.

This past winter, the Surfing foundation gave away eight grants, funding altering wheelchairs, travel expenses, as well as equipment for recreational sports, competitions and leisure.

Inspired by the mission and goals of the Surfing foundation, MAX Challenge of Lewes, Delaware felt moved to help in any way they could.

MAX Challenge of Lewes owner Jerry Carmody finds fulfillment in helping the community in the areas of fitness and nutrition, but he also emphasized that the key factor in understanding those things goes back to mindset and motivations.

When the organization was given the opportunity to identify a local charity, they came across the Surfing Foundation and saw commonalities among their goals.

"All three organizations, they have one goal in mind and that's to break through your obstacles. To persevere," Carmody said. "So, we saw that element coming together and we said: surfing, fitness and being positive all the way around, we help our members and they help themselves break through mental obstacles, and physical obstacles and that's what Surfing does."

The event included a variety of raffles donated by members of the Surfing Team, as well as members of MAX Challenge of Lewes, and the different organizations sold t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other paraphernalia to go toward the cause. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the fundraiser went directly to the Surfing Foundation.

The third organization that Carmody mentions was the addition of motivational speaker Scott Chesney to the charity event.

Paralyzed from the waist down due to a rare stroke at the age of 15, Scott Chesney has spent the last 34 years of his life in a wheelchair.

Motivational speaker and life coach Scott Chesney explains his philosophy of creating an "I'm possible attitude" rather than an impossible one. *Photo by Caroline Streett.*

Being a rather active child before the stroke, Chesney was at first devastated by the news that he will never walk again and that he would never

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"I decided a long time ago that I was going to stop having bad days," Chesney said. "Sure, we all have moments of pain and sadness, but we can't let that define our whole day. Where there is one thing to be upset about, there are 10,000 to be grateful for."



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During his speech, Chesney emphasized the importance of attitude and being grateful for life. "I have gotten to a point where I know it's my attitude that gets me in that wheelchair," Chesney said. "Every single day for 34 years I've gotten into that wheelchair...Why? That's my attitude. My attitude has told me that when you get in that wheelchair, that's half the battle. That's showing up for life."

Chesney explained that the other half the battle is exercising the power to choose.

It was Chesney's choice to be positive that led him to the life he's living today... helping others cook

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Karen Ronkartz and Louise Brown of Lewes, DL smile in awe at Scott Chesney's story of triumph.

Photo by Caroline Streett.

Chesney was told he could never have kids, yet he refused to let his disability define his goals, and he went back to doctors until their diagnosis changed.

Now the proud father of two teenage kids, Chesney defied the odds and saw a dream he first thought to be impossible, become possible.

Being the personable and warm person that he is, Chesney went beyond the confines of a motivational speech solely on his life and questioned audience members about their specific goals, and then gave them advice on how to reach them.

He prompted the room with a simple question, "What is something in your life that you could be doing more of?"

Chris Amoruso of Lincoln, California volunteered his answer that he would like to be doing more of the things that make him happy—specifically costume design.

As a means of helping Amoruso achieve these goals, Chesney asked the room, "Now, does anyone in here know of anyone in the fashion industry?"

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Chris Amoruso of Lincoln, California radiates joy and surprise at the opportunity to meet people in the field of costume-design. Amoruso's aunt Geri Ann Jacobson beams with happiness for her nephew. *Photo by Caroline Streett.*

When his question yielded no response from the room, Chesney smiled and gave Amoruso an opportunity he will never forget.



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"I'll tell you what. I know of a woman who works up in Headquarters at Ralph Lauren. I can't make any promises, but I will get you in touch with her," Chesney said.

With his eyes beaming with joy Amoruso covered his jaw-dropped mouth with his hands, speechless at the opportunity.

"Thank you so much, I can't tell you how much this means to me," Amoruso said.

Chesney just smiled, and continued to go around the room and push people to overcome their fears and strive to act on their goals, no matter how out of reach they may seem.

As the event came to a close, Liesener showed gratitude for Chesney's presence and the event as a

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