



The Wright & Filippis Community Newsletter

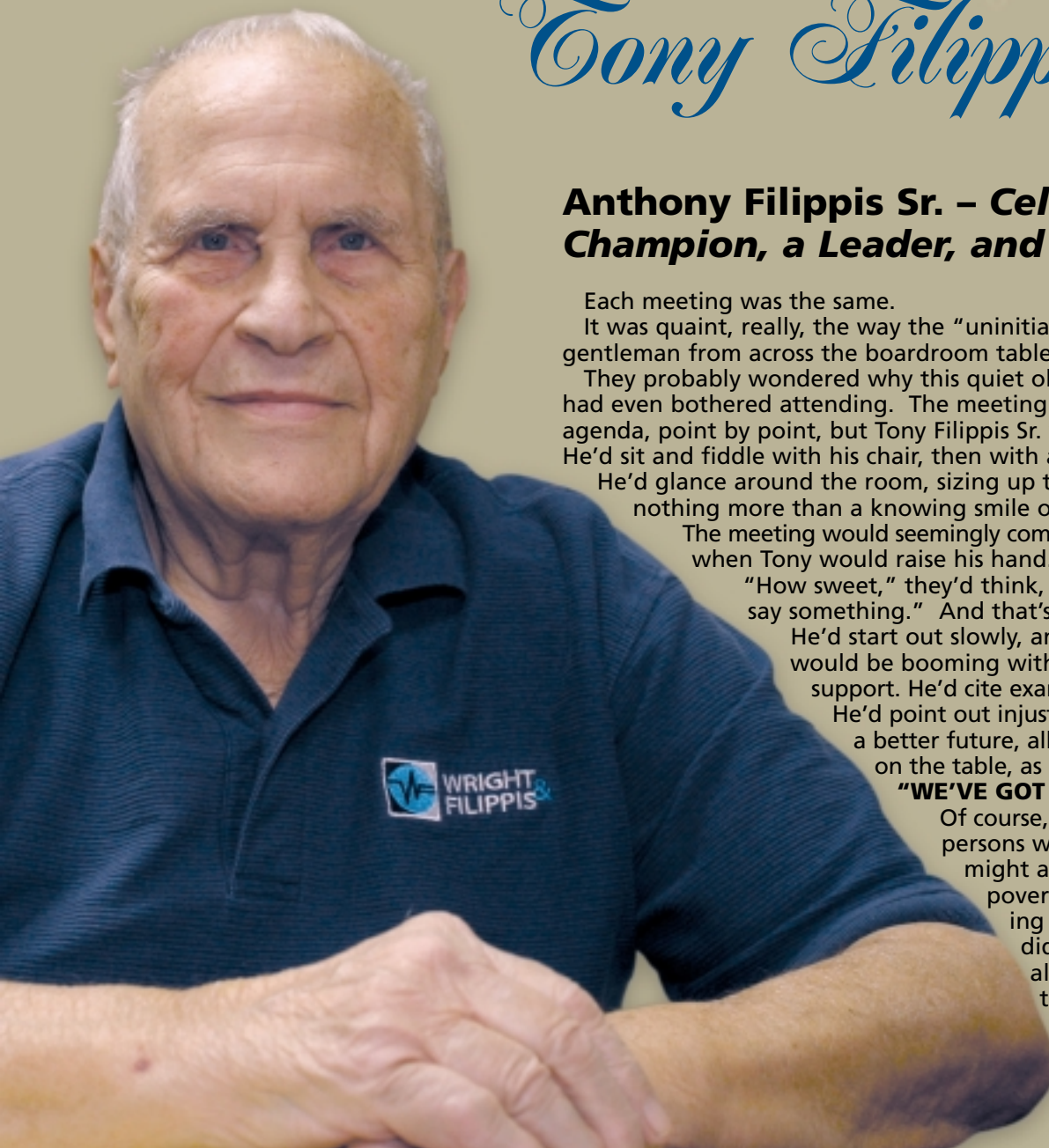


SPECIAL EDITON

A Tribute to

Tony Filippis Sr.

1915-2007



Anthony Filippis Sr. – Celebrating a Champion, a Leader, and Our Friend

Each meeting was the same.

It was quaint, really, the way the “uninitiated” would view the kindly gentleman from across the boardroom table.

They probably wondered why this quiet old man, now in his 91st year, had even bothered attending. The meeting would continue through its agenda, point by point, but Tony Filippis Sr. wouldn’t utter a word. He’d sit and fiddle with his chair, then with a small stack of papers.

He’d glance around the room, sizing up the attendees, contributing nothing more than a knowing smile or a thoughtful nod.

The meeting would seemingly come to a close...and that’s when Tony would raise his hand.

“How sweet,” they’d think, “the old man is going to say something.” And that’s when Tony took control.

He’d start out slowly, and within minutes, the room would be booming with Tony’s passionate plea for support. He’d cite examples of discrimination.

He’d point out injustices. He’d share his vision of a better future, all the while pounding his fist on the table, as if to emphasize each word:

“WE’VE GOT TO HELP THESE PEOPLE!”

Of course, “these people” were usually persons with disabilities. But they

might also be children living in poverty, or single mothers need-

ing support. The specific cause didn’t really matter much –

all that mattered to Tony was that someone needed help.

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS SPECIAL EDITION



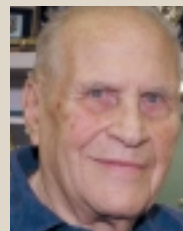
Remembering Tony...

Various people remembering their experiences with Tony Filippis Sr.
Pages 2-7



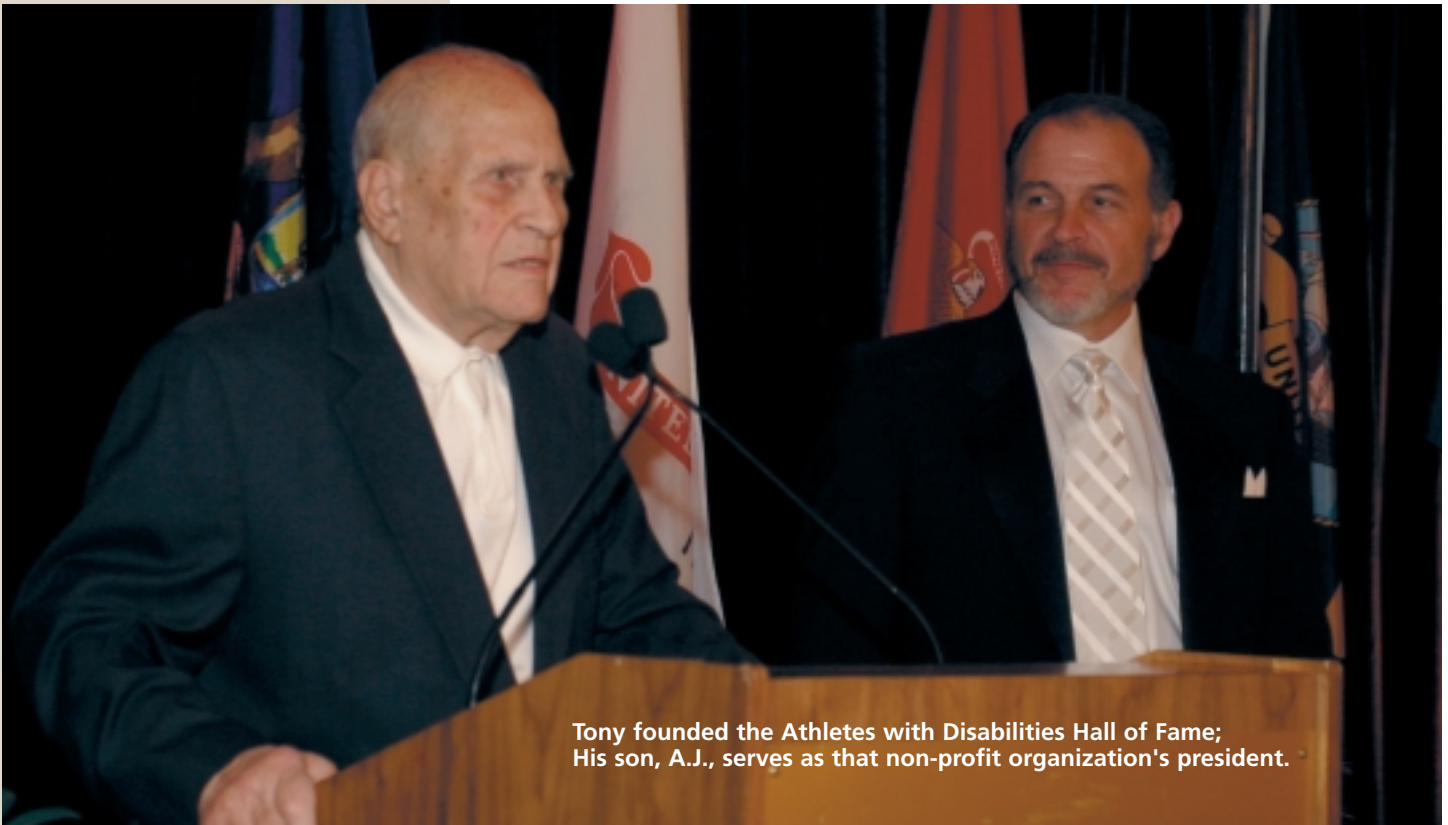
“I Was Very, Very Fortunate” An Essay by Tony Filippis Sr.

People with disabilities don’t want anything special – they just want the chance to earn a living.
Page 6



Truly Making a Difference

Tony Filippis was honored many times for his significant charitable contributions.
Page 8



Tony founded the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame; His son, A.J., serves as that non-profit organization's president.

Remembering Tony...

"Tony was a tenacious advocate, a successful businessman, a passionate athlete and a man of honor and integrity. His tireless efforts not only opened the door for people with disabilities, but created a playing field for them across Michigan and beyond. Our thoughts and prayers are with Tony's family today as we mourn the loss of this Michigan hero."

*Jennifer Granholm
Governor – State of Michigan*

"He was an extraordinary man. His enthusiasm was infectious and he had an enormous impact on so many people's lives. He will be greatly missed."

*Roger Faulkner
Former Chairman
Michigan Sports Hall of Fame*

"I am amazed at the impact he had on so many lives – truly the measure of a GREAT person."

*Jim Abbott
Former Professional Baseball Player*

continued from page 1

It wasn't long before the "uninitiated" became Tony's friends, and when you attend a lot of meetings, you make a lot of friends. That's one of the reasons Guardian Angels Catholic Church was so crowded on January 26... as one of Tony's friends, it was your last chance to say good-bye.

We lost someone very special on January 23. We lost a champion, a true, modern-day hero. Tony was an icon for the disabled community, but his impact was greater – much greater – than that. He helped changed the general public's collective mindset about the capabilities of persons with disabilities. He provided leadership, support and a voice to a community that previously had little. Despite his own physical challenges, he created a company that has given employment to thousands of families – a company whose services have touched tens of thousands of lives.

In reality, Tony would probably be a little embarrassed, and slightly ticked off, at all the attention his passing has attracted. He always went to great lengths to redirect the spotlight. You'd frequently hear him saying "This isn't about me," or "I could never do this alone – everyone deserves the credit."

But with all due respect, Tony, this truly is about you.

Tony was Tony

In the days following Tony's death, a longtime friend was asked to describe Tony to a newspaper reporter.

"Tony was... well... Tony." To everyone who knew Tony, this makes perfect sense. Tony was authentic, the real deal, the genuine article. He was a one-of-a-kind.

Tony was rough and gruff and impatient – poor qualities if you're a marriage counselor or brain surgeon, but fabulous if you're trying to improve the human condition. He was also determined, dependable, empathetic and generous. Take all the really flattering adjectives you could find in a thesaurus – all the ones you'd use for a favorite uncle or grandfather – and those applied to Tony.

Perhaps more than anything, Tony was available – available to his family and friends, available to people in need. Tony never turned anyone away. If he had it in his power to help – and he normally did – Tony was available.

Tony was available because, at a young age, he learned first-hand the frustration and heartache frequently confronted by persons with disabilities. He lost both of his legs below the knee in a train accident at the age of 13. The disappointments and discrimination he faced throughout his life fueled his passion for making a difference in the lives of others.

Fate... and Destiny

The story behind Tony Filippis' incredible journey from a poor Depression-era youngster to a respected businessman and advocate for the disabled community dates back to April 29, 1929. That is the day 13-year-old Tony wandered away from the safety of his family's Detroit home, tempted fate, and forever altered the course of history for generations of disabled citizens.

"Some neighborhood kids came by and talked me into going swimming," Tony once recalled. "We hopped the train near Louisiana and Brush to ride to a swimming hole, but the train was moving too fast to jump off.

"We ended up near Nine Mile and Hilton in Ferndale, when suddenly the train jerked, and I fell and grabbed the coupling as my feet slapped the tracks. I climbed back up and someone yelled, 'Look! Your feet!' They were mangled beyond recognition, and later they had to be amputated below the knees."

Those nightmarish moments changed his life forever. Depressed, but not defeated, Tony would later learn to make the artificial limbs that would carry him to prominence as an admired member of the business community, and to an even greater presence as a respected voice for the disabled.

While his keen business savvy helped build Wright & Filippis into one the nation's most successful private medical enterprises, Tony's enthusiastic support for the rights of the disabled was arguably unrivaled. And his passion for this cause was learned at an early age.

"Things were different in those days. I hired in at a lot of places, but when they found out I had artificial legs, they fired me," Tony said.

"I got a job in a tailor shop because I was good at sewing. The owner came by one day and asked why I was limping. I tried to play it down, but he persisted until I finally told him I had artificial legs. He fired me on the spot."

He took his anger and frustration to Carl Wright, a friend who worked at Martin-Halstead Co. and the gentleman who had made Tony's artificial legs. When Tony asked Wright for an adjustment, Wright knew something was wrong.

Tony explained: "I told him, 'I'm branded as a cripple. I can't get a job anyplace. They hire me and when they find out about my legs, they fire me.'"

Wright did something that would forever impact Tony's destiny - he offered Tony a

"He had a truly heroic life and was a role model for all of us to reflect on what we each can do to make this a better world. His exuberance was for not only the wonderful projects he engaged in during his life, but for life itself. He gave life his enthusiastic best.

*Fred M. Mester
Oakland County Circuit Judge*

"What a special, noble gentleman he was. He will be greatly missed, but his legacy will live on."

*Tim Pendell
Senior Director of Community Affairs
Detroit Lions*

"I will never forget him. He was a philosopher. His message that we can all leave the world a better place resonated. We think of many industry leaders as living in an 'ivory tower', but Tony clearly kept his feet firmly rooted in his past, in the realities of life, and his vision to the future."

*Robin Meyers
On My Own of Michigan*

"The stories I did with Tony Sr. were wonderful memories. He really touched so many people... and improved so many lives... I know he's only left us physically."

*Paula Tutman
WDIV-TV Detroit*



Governor Jennifer Granholm appointed Tony as Vice Chair on the Commission for Disability Concerns.



Tony won four medals at the age of 82.

"Personally, Tony was an inspiration, a leader, a tireless advocate for the disability community in Michigan, and a friend."

*John Pedraza
Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities
Michigan State University*

"We have lost a great champion."
*Jim Hughes
Executive Director
CATCH*

"If there was anyone who impacted my life, he impacted my life the most. We would talk every day. He loved people so much, and he was one of those people who had a true and genuine connection to people. This loss is immeasurable, because there never will be another Tony. His work and spirit has been passed on to the world."
*Richard Bernstein
Attorney*

"He sure was a wonderful man, and I am so glad to have known him. My life is different because of knowing him."
*Carey Winkel
Senior Vice President
Sunrise Medical*

job as an apprentice. The two men worked together for 10 years before they formed their own company - Wright & Filippis.

"We started the business in 1944," Tony said. "We worked hard and it grew and grew. That's because we had good people here, good people who cared about people, and we always put the customer first. We just tried to help. We've always felt we could help anyone - and there are a lot of people who need it."

The Importance of Sports

Like many young boys growing up in Detroit, sports had a profound influence on Tony.

"I was like any other kid," Tony said. "I loved sports - I lived sports. I slept at night with a baseball. Sports was always going to be an important part of my life, and as I got older, it was going to be a way for me to reach out to people who needed a break. These people - myself included - needed to be active."

Tony used the success he enjoyed in the business world to blaze a trail for athletes with disabilities. In 1946, he formed the first bowling league for the disabled, and later that same year, established a swimming program for the disabled at Detroit's Patton Pool. It wasn't long before Tony developed a variety of other sports programs for both able-bodied and disabled athletes, including basketball, baseball, softball, golf, tennis, boxing (he trained as many as 22 amateur fighters at one time), and track & field.

Tony himself participated in every one of these sports. As an example of his own athletic prowess, he captured gold medals in the shot put, javelin, discus and baseball throw in the Michigan Wheelchair Athletic Association Regional Games - a spectacular feat considering the then-82-year-old Tony competed in an open division against athletes of all ages. He did, in fact, establish state records in all four events and qualified for the national games.

His further contributions to athletic and recreational activities were also impressive. For more than 25 years, Wright & Filippis has hosted "Wheelchair Daze", a free picnic which annually welcomes more than 1,200 persons with disabilities and their guests. And



Tony welcomed thousands of guests to the annual Wheelchair Daze Picnic.

the Gene Filippis Memorial Golf Benefit raises more than \$50,000 each year for a variety of community non-profit organizations.

The Hall of Fame

More recently, Tony made sports history in 1999 when he founded the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame. The mission of the Hall of Fame is to honor Michigan's athletes with disabilities who have demonstrated achievement in sports and are positive role models in the community, as well as to educate the public about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. This unique non-profit organization also strives to provide support for recreational and educational programs for persons with disabilities.

The Hall of Fame now serves as the linchpin for the Adaptive Sports Coalition, an alliance of more than 20 locally-based groups which provide various recreational opportunities for persons with disabilities. The influence and impact of the Hall of Fame continues to grow in the community by focusing on education, awareness and scholarship programs.

Tony's dream of an organization that directly impacts the lives of persons with disabilities continues to stimulate the Hall of Fame's progress. The Hall of Fame recently developed a mentoring program in which its alumni visit classrooms and deliver motivational speeches to students throughout the state. The Hall of Fame has also established a scholarship endowment to benefit young athletes with disabilities as well as those children who aspire to careers that will benefit the disabled community.



Gene, Nancy and A.J.

Continuing the Mission

Tony was born September 13, 1915. He is survived by his wife, Frances, a daughter, Nancy (Hakala), and a son, Anthony J. (A.J.), currently President and CEO of Wright & Filippis. He was preceded in death by his oldest son, Eugene, who lost his battle with cancer in 1997. Tony is also survived by 14 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

Tony Filippis' hard work, determination and vision have brought hope to thousands of disabled persons, nurturing belief and fulfilling dreams.

"Each generation is better off than the last," Tony once said, "and it's our job to see to it that we make this world a better place for everyone."

Yes, there's still much more work to be done – we've got to help these people.

Tony, you can count on us.

"Over the years, Filippis won enough awards to line a wall at the funeral home. In 2004, he was named a Detroit News Michiganian of the Year. One plaque came from William Clay Ford, another from President Gerald Ford. He wasn't impressed, he told me, and he wasn't through. Whatever he accomplished wasn't enough for him, not as long as there were people who needed help and couldn't get it. But it was a heck of a lot, and a heck of a life.

Neal Rubin

The Detroit News

"The metro area is mourning the death of one of the most courageous and inspirational individuals to ever call Detroit home.... The energetic and tenacious advocate was more than just a wonderful role model for people with disabilities, he was an inspiration to all."

Editorial

The Oakland Press

"His wise voice was always in favor of selflessness, of generosity and of putting the interests of other people first. But Tony was not content with using words to inspire. Rather, he led and inspired by example, amassing an extraordinary record of charitable service."

Pat McDonald

Michigan Chapter President

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

"His approach to life and its challenges was always the opportunity to try to accomplish the positive – and he certainly did just that."

John S. Fowler

Founder

The Fowler Center for Outdoor Learning

"He was beloved by so many – as a friend, a mentor, and a role model. In Yiddish, there is a word 'mensch' – a person of good sense, reliable and honor – and Tony was certainly the epitome of that word."

Sue Burstein-Kahn

Executive Director

ALS of Michigan

"His energy, enthusiasm and passion for helping others were remarkable. He has set a wonderful example for all of us to follow."

*Sally Owen
Senior Vice President
Boys and Girls Club of South
Oakland County*

"What a beautiful and full life he had. One could only hope to accomplish a portion of what he has!"

*Lisa Brady
Invacare Corporation*

"He taught all of us a thing or two about priorities, about caring, and about giving. And about DOING!"

*David Layne
The HOMES Coalition*

"Tony Sr. will be greatly missed in this community that he has served so well over the years. May his vision and love continue to be a beacon for all of us to follow."

*Sue Brooks
Paws with a Cause*

"What a remarkable man – what a remarkable life."

*Tom Hussmann
The Fowler Center*

"Tony was a wonderful, giving man and he will be missed dearly. I consider it an honor to have known him and worked with him in his mission to help those with disabilities."

*Kim Doverspike
Community Affairs
Detroit Lions*

"He was a legendary figure and will be dearly missed."

*Laurie Reizian
National Kidney Foundation of
Michigan*

"Tony did not recognize or see color – he simply looked at your heart to help others, just like he so eloquently expressed daily."

*Shirley Burch
Community United for Progress*



"I Was Very, Very Fortunate" An Essay by Tony Filippis Sr.



(The following essay was written by Tony Filippis Sr. in 2004 on the occasion of Wright & Filippis' 60th anniversary.)

Today, they refer to people as being "handicapped", or "disabled", or "physically challenged".

When I was a boy, they called me a "cripple". But when you are unable to support your family or serve your country, shame and humiliation hurt more than words ever could.

I was one of eight children in a working-class family of Italian immigrants. We lived in what amounted to being a garage, complete with a dirt floor and cardboard on the walls – it wasn't much, but during the Depression, you didn't complain. In the spring of 1929, some friends and I hopped on a moving train near our neighborhood. I lost my grip... and my legs were

crushed beneath the train's wheels. I later had them amputated below the knees.

My family was already on hard times, and here I was, an invalid with no legs. We didn't have the money for a wheelchair, and we couldn't afford



prosthetic legs. I would spend most afternoons sitting on our front porch, a blanket around my waist to hide my handicap. When I needed to go somewhere, my brothers would lift me into a wagon and pull me down the street – of course, I was sure to keep that blanket around me. I felt like a burden to my family. My brothers could get odd jobs to help support the family. I was another mouth to feed.

I don't mention these things to exact pity. It's just important for you to know.

As a young man with prosthetic legs, I was more-than-capable of holding down a full-time job – I was good with my hands and strong as an ox. But three times I had jobs, and each time, after they discovered I had artificial limbs, I was fired. "You can't work here," they'd say. "You're a cripple."

Years later, I ended up learning the trade from the man who made my first prosthetic legs, Carl Wright. Carl worked near the riverfront in Detroit, and each day I would take the bus about six miles down Woodward Avenue to Carl's shop. During World War II, the bus was crowded with mothers, grandmothers and children – and me. All the other men had gone off to fight in the war, and I was left behind. I thought I had an opportunity to serve when the army advertised that it needed prosthetists, but they flat out refused me. I was told the army "didn't want any cripples". So I continued to ride that bus each day, embarrassed and ashamed that I couldn't help my country.

In the long run, I was very, very fortunate. I had the support of a loving family and many close friends, and we were able to build a business that allows us to help the disabled on a daily basis. The business is still around and still helping more and more people each day, so I suppose you could call it successful.

I'm not the most educated man in the world. But I learned first-hand what people – all people – want. They want freedom. Independence. Self-respect. These can be fine concepts for most people, but for a person with a disability, they mean the world.

People with disabilities don't want anything special – they just want the chance to earn a living. To visit their friends. To feel like they matter... and make a difference.

When I see an amputee, or someone in a wheelchair, or someone needing a helping hand, I sometimes remember the shame I felt on that Detroit porch more than 70 years ago.

No person should ever feel that way.

"He was a great man, and I have been privileged to have known him."

*Rita Grezlik
World Medical Relief*

"I admired his devotion to so many people together with his lifetime of achievements. Most of us go through life only thinking of ourselves or family, however Tony dedicated his to so much more."

Randy Rosebush

"I feel deeply honored that I got to know Tony – I hope God gives me and many more people the time to be half the man he was."

Juan Pablo Salazar

"We the Sons of the American Revolution were proud of our association with him due to his 'Americanism' spirit and care to the disabled. We were proud to award him our Silver Good Citizenship Medal for his service to humanity."

*Richard Steele
Sons of the American Revolution*

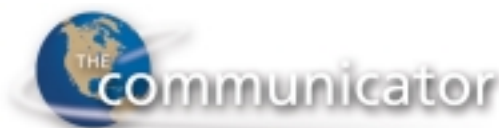
"Tony was such an amazing person and made a difference in so many people's lives. I feel fortunate to have known him."

*Angie Schmucker
School of Education and Human Services
Oakland University*

"Tony has always been a part of my life since I was nine months old. He always reminded me that I was the youngest patient he ever had, chuckling at how tiny I was the first time he worked on me as a baby on my parents' kitchen table. Tony was like a second father to me, taking time to come to my high school graduation, my wedding and rejoicing the birth of my sons.... Tony has brought hope, joy, happiness and encouragement beyond measure to all who have had the privilege and honor to know him."

Linda (Arndt) Orth

Design:
Bauer Dunham & Barr



2845 Crooks Rd.
Rochester Hills, MI 48309

Presorted
Standard
US Postage
PAID
The Technicom
Group



Guiding Principles:

Wright & Filippis builds personal and professional satisfaction within our associates upon the foundation of Equality, Trust, Mutual Respect and Teamwork. We believe that continuous improvement and recognition of employee performance will yield a positive work environment and superior customer service. These values will be integrated and celebrated throughout our organization.



Truly Making a Difference

Not surprisingly, Tony Filippis was honored many times for his significant charitable contributions. Among his notable achievements and awards:

- Recipient of the 2007 Humanitarian Award (presented by the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan);
- Named a 2004 Michiganian-of-the-Year (presented by the Detroit News);
- The 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award (the Arthritis Foundation);
- The 2003 da Vinci Lifetime Achievement Award (the Muscular Sclerosis Society);
- The 2002 William Clay Ford Community Quarterback Award (the Detroit Lions);
- The 2002 Alvin Foon Humanitarian Award (the Michigan Jewish Sports Foundation);
- The 2000 Gerald Ford Sports Person of the Year Award (the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame);
- The Joe Louis Award (Sports Illustrated);
- Community Hero Torchbearer (the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games);
- The Excellence in Achievement-Lifetime Award (the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan);
- The Sunnie Wilson 'Spirit of the Champ' Award (the Joe Louis Memorial organization);
- The Brooks-Royal Memorial Award (the Michigan Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America);
- The Lifetime Achievement Award (the American Orthotic-Prosthetic Association);
- The Alan S. Jeffery Outstanding Service Award (the Michigan Physical Therapy Association);
- The Italian-American of the Year Award (the Italian Study Club of Troy);
- Certificate of Merit (the Office of Service to the Aging);
- Humanitarian Award (the Neuro-Muscular Institute with Providence Hospital and Medical Centers);
- And a special Lifetime Contributions Award (Oakland County Parks).