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Shooting for the green: Inventor believes in himself and latest product

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By: [Beth Rickers](#), Worthington Daily Globe



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That league was Mike’s first taste of entrepreneurship — and he’s been promoting ideas and inventing products ever since. Although Lake City is home, he recently trekked through southwest Minnesota, where both his parents grew up — his dad, Merrel Duncan in Dundee and mom Bernice “Bonnie” Sivula Duncan in Heron Lake — to promote his latest invention, Lend-A-Hand, a universal assistant device for physically challenged individuals.

“From one end of the country to another, I’ve met people with different challenges, and this has helped them to overcome those challenges,” said Mike about the device that provides arm support, leverage and strength for tasks and activities such as golf, painting, raking, washing dishes and fishing. “There’s nothing else like this out there. I’ve got two patents applied for — design and usage.”

Today, Mike runs a company, Even Par Enterprises, through which he markets and sells several products, including Lend-A-Hand. Always a “square peg in a round hole,” Mike has become successful at such endeavors through hard work and determination.

“In high school, I was not a great student,” he said. “When I got my SAT scores, they said, ‘Don’t even think about going to college.’ But son of a buck, I did go on, and I made it. God wants all of us to be successful; it’s just how hard do you want to be successful?”

After the bowling league, Mike’s next taste of success came in the music arena.

“Believe it or not, I was a rock ‘n’ roller,” he said with a laugh. “I put a group together, The Jivaros. In a small town, what’s there to do? I always wanted to find things to do other than get into trouble. We really perfected our skill of harmony with ‘50s and ‘60s music. We got to be so good and played at colleges all over, the state fair. We even cut a record. I was always the guy calling around making it happen.”

In college, Mike earned a degree in business administration and then went into the military. He and wife Pat married in 1970 and had two children — one son, one daughter — and Mike now has three grandchildren. Pat died seven years ago of pancreatic cancer.

“I was very blessed to have a wife who believed in me. She married me when I didn’t have a pot to throw out,” Mike said. “She always stood behind me.”

In 1992, Mike developed his first product — the Bumper Caddy, designed to affix a cooler to a golf cart or other motorized vehicle.

“I love golf,” he said. “At one time, I was a three handicapper. I just love the game.

“But I never liked watching people shove cans in those plastic bags full of ice that they give you at the golf course or putting a cooler in the sweater basket on the golf cart. So I invented this so you could hook it on the bumper. I pursued it real aggressive.”

Next came the Cooler Jacket, an adjustable and customizable cooler cover, and Easy Par, a golf GPS system.

“Then I got sidestepped when Sue came into my life,” said Mike, referring to Sue Seeger, a young stroke victim from Lake City who inspired Lend-A Hand. “All my thoughts and ability went into that.”

“The stroke left me severely paralyzed,” recalled Sue, who often travels with Mike to demonstrate the Lend-A-Hand. “I was only able to take my first step after a month. I was in a wheelchair for a good year, then had a severe limp. I spent five years after the stroke rehabilitating myself. It was

caused by a rare birth defect, an undeveloped blood vessel in my brain. The doctors told me I'd be bed-ridden for the rest of my life."

To Sue, that prognosis was "unacceptable," so she persevered and regained as much of her mobility and function as possible, although she still has weakness in her right arm and is unable to use her right hand. But she wanted to play a sport and set her sights on one that she thought she might be able to do with one arm — golf.

"Mike and my paths crossed, and we became friends," Sue recounted. "From there, I thought maybe Mike could invent a product that could help me golf, and he came up with Lend-A-Hand. Now, I can hit (a golf ball) 150 yards straight with one hand."

Not only does the device enable Sue to swing a golf club, it helps her to "feel whole again" and accomplish a wealth of other tasks that people who have full function of their arm take for granted: grating cheese, scrubbing dishes, sweeping the floor.

"It was life changing for me," she said. "It really helped me and increased my mobility back in my arm."

Mike and Sue have demonstrated the device to medical facilities, including the Mayo Clinic, across the region, and received an enthusiastic response. But for Mike, it's the comments from the actual users of Lend-A-Hand that mean the most.

"The biggest thrill for me is that I've had people come over after using Lend-A-Hand with tears in their eyes and tell me what it's done for them," he described. "What we're doing with a device like this is giving back the opportunity to be part of life again."

Working closely with Sue on developing and promoting Lend-A-Hand, Mike regularly witnesses what a difference his invention has made in her life.

"God gave her this challenge, and I don't have the answer why, but I do have the answer to make her life better and to enhance what's there," he said. "You don't look at the negatives of life, just the positives."

With that can-do attitude, Mike has persevered through challenges in his own life, such as his wife's illness and death, and built a company that now markets several viable products — and one in particular with the potential to be highly successful.

"When I first did the company, in order to get to the next level, I had to find a way to do financial growth," he explained. "It's not cheap to get patents. But I had good people around me, family and friends who always believed in me. A friend asked, 'Why don't you sell private stock in the

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But Mike has always been willing to risk everything on a dream, and now it is gratifying to see his dream of making life better for people like Sue become a reality.

"There are two things I believe in," Mike said. "One is faith in God, and the second is in myself. You have to be positive and focused. God gave us so much time on earth, and we have to maximize our effort or we let ourselves down. You have to have a never-say-die attitude. I had a lot of doors slammed in my face, but when you believe you yourself, you never stop."

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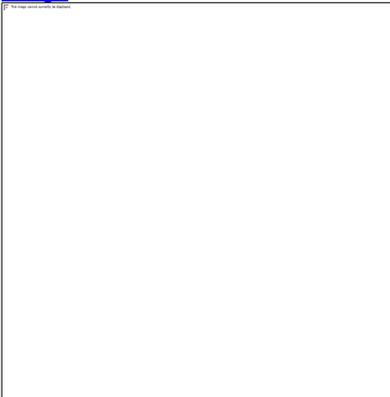
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Mike Duncan

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Sue Seeger and Mike Duncan

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