

King's Herald

A magazine for alumni and friends of King's University College
at Western University Canada

Spring 2017



Photo by Anne Geddes

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Mr. Robert C. Buren
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A photograph of a male athlete, Robert Buren '95, celebrating a victory on a handcycle. He is wearing a black sleeveless jersey, a white and black helmet with the number 107, and black gloves. He is raising his right arm in a celebratory gesture. The handcycle is yellow and black with the number 107 on the frame. In the background, a crowd of spectators is visible behind a blue barrier with the Newton logo. The ground is paved with a pattern of red and blue lines.

ROCK THE CHAIR

For Robert Buren '95, everything in his life changed on October 5, 2008.

By Natalia Otten, King's Communications Intern

While mountain biking with a friend, Robert attempted to jump an obstacle, but his awkward landing sent him over the handlebars and head first into the dirt, instantly breaking his back and leaving him paralyzed. He was 37 years old, married and a father of two daughters aged 4 and 2. Robert went from being fully able-bodied to learning to live without the use of his lower body. With the inspiration of his family, he was determined to continue living life as independently as possible.

Prior to his injury, Robert had always been active and even thought about competing in a triathlon. After his accident, he turned to sports as a major part of his rehab, and, once he realized that this dream could still become a reality, he sought the guidance of Chris Bourne, from Ottawa, one of the world's leading paratriathletes at the time, and with the help of his family and friends, started working towards this goal.

It wasn't overnight that Robert learned to adapt to his new reality and acquire new skills. For several years after the accident, he built up his strength and endurance with the ultimate goal of competing in an Ironman. Known as one of the most difficult endurance events in the world, the Ironman triathlon is a 226 km race. It begins with a 3.8km swim, followed by a 180km bike, and finally, finishes with a full marathon run (42.2km). Athletes have 17 hours to complete the race, and Robert sought to do this with just his arms.

Robert began with shorter distances and increased his endurance over time. To date, he has completed 6 half-iron distance triathlons and 2 full Ironman races. In 2016, he became the first Canadian paraplegic to qualify for, and complete, the Ironman World Championship in Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii. With each race that Robert completes, he personifies the Ironman mantra that "anything is possible".

Robert attributes much of his success to his family and the positive people in his life. He constantly challenges stereotypes and reminds people not to feel sorry for him. Instead, he encourages others to try and keep up. Rather than making assumptions about what he can't do, he wants to show people what he can accomplish.

A large part of Robert's life now is about giving back. He recently joined the Board of Directors with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, an organization that was a tremendous resource for him during his recovery. Through his community work, Robert wants to make the world more inclusive and change peoples' opinions about



those with disabilities. "I want to educate people on what's possible for anyone with a disability, and how important it is to make our world more inclusive."

Through speaking engagements at high schools, universities and other public and corporate events, Robert uses his love of public speaking to share his story and inspire others. In 2012, he participated in a TEDx Youth event in Mississauga, where he was the keynote speaker that closed out the event.

Currently, Robert is focusing his time on building a non-profit mentoring association called NBT Mentors (NBT stands for No Better Time). With hopes of launching the program in the summer of 2017, Robert is building a network of mentors across Canada that can give back to the community by helping students, non-profits and small businesses. He explains, "If I can capture the cream of the crop to build this mentoring community, I think it could really have a dramatic impact on our country, and on those who either give their time to or are willing to benefit from mentorship." To learn more about NBT Mentors and sign up for the newsletter, visit: www.nbtmentors.org.

Robert gives a great amount of credit to King's University College for his career accomplishments. He is grateful for the education he received at King's and appreciates the knowledge he gained. Both the culture of the school and the professors who he has stayed in contact with have had a tremendous impact on his life.

Robert has a few simple keys to success: Focus on what you can do, rather than what you cannot; set goals that are big, but achievable; surround yourself with positive and successful people; and always work hard. "With dedication and determination, I truly believe that anything is possible."

Check out Robert's blog: www.rockthechair.com

