

Editorial

Memorial to Dr. John Nietupski

It is with great sadness that I share with the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* readership the passing of Dr. John Nietupski, a tremendous leader and true friend in the fields of special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation. It is rare, indeed, when one can be as intellectually and creatively gifted yet at the same time be so down to earth, positive, congenial and kind. We should all wish we could leave the legacy John did.

I first met John in a school classroom in the Madison, Wisconsin public schools. He was teaching students with severe disabilities, was cheerful, organized, systematic and continually positive no matter how hectic things became. John was always very welcoming to me, a doctoral student. Over the years, we became very good long distance professional friends. He served on the editorial board of this journal, published frequently, but above all was functional, practical and very “in touch” with kids with disabilities and their families.

John chose to be in the schools. He was good in many disciplines, but perhaps his greatest strengths were in guiding many youth into adulthood and in business development. He was a marvelous trainer and motivator.

I cannot ever recall anything negative being said about John Nietupski. He was extremely well liked and loved by all. He should not be gone. It is a huge loss for all of us, of course, his loving family, and persons with disabilities. He often talked about his family proudly and as a great source of joy.

I have spoken with many people about the loss of John. All have been greatly saddened and shocked. I, personally, will greatly miss him.

In closing, I am so happy John’s family is allowing *JVR* to publish below his lasting memory.

Paul Wehman
Editor

John A. Nietupski, 58, a wonderful person, loving husband, father and friend, died Wednesday, November 19, 2008 at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. While all lives end too early, John filled every minute of his life by bringing laughter and joy to all the people he touched with his smile and positive attitude.

He is survived by his two best friends: the love of his life, wife Sue Hamre-Nietupski, and son Chris Nietupski, who both will continue on his personal mission of enriching their lives and those of others around them with the passion and spirit of positive thinking while living each day to its utmost potential.

John was born on March 10, 1950 in Madison, Wisconsin, or as he described it, “in the shadows of Camp Randall stadium.” His career as a Badger began as a young boy, selling Cokes in the stadium on game days. His love for Wisconsin athletics was superceded only by his love for family, friends and a career dedicated to helping others in the fields of education and special education. He combined passions for his career and for sports by attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he obtained a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree and ultimately a doctorate in education in 1978.

Along with Sue, John’s early career included positions as a professor of special education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the University of Northern Iowa (where Chris would attend and become a lifelong Panther fan) and later as a visiting professor at the University of Iowa. Since 1997, John worked with Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA) as a grant writer and resource development specialist, with the goal of obtaining state and national funding for education projects for Iowa school districts.

Through his work at GWAEA, John was able to create and fund a program near and dear to him, Career Connections. The US Department of Education-funded transition program began in 2001 in six school districts, with the mission of assisting young people with dis-

abilities in their efforts to find jobs of interest to them and become successful in the community upon high school graduation. Now in 27 school districts and helping more than 70 students each year, the program has flourished, with a dedicated staff of nine truly amazing people who mirror John's passion of serving these young adults.

John received numerous awards and recognition for his service to the field of special education throughout his career, most notably when he and Sue were given the ARC of Iowa and the ARC of the United States *Educator of the Year* awards. But to John, his proudest 'award' was the distinction bestowed on him by the Career Connections staff: "Dr. Fun". The nickname enveloped both his passion for his career and also an uncanny ability to remember that even when there is work to be done, it doesn't mean you can't find a way to always enjoy what you do.

When away from work, John loved travel and sports. His love for travel took him and Sue all across Europe and the US (every state except South Carolina!), including countless visits to the shores of Sturgeon Bay and Lake Michigan in Door County, Wisconsin. Furthermore, it goes without saying that his love for sports brought much joy (and at times, the "agony of defeat") and a special bond with Chris. Those who knew John

well would agree that his true hobby was simply being a "people person". Whether to offer advice, to take an interest in your passions or simply to have someone there to watch the big game with, John loved to be around people. And people loved him.

John was preceded in death by mother Sarah (Fodera) Nietupski; father Stanley Nietupski; maternal grandparents Giovanni and Rosa (Bonfiglio) Fodera, immigrants from Sicily whom John adored and who helped raise him; paternal grandparents Anton and Anna (Lomasz), immigrants from Poland and Lithuania; uncles Alex and John and aunt Ann Nietupski; and beloved mother and father-in law Wilmer and Mary (Stanke) Hamre.

In addition to Sue and Chris, John is survived by loving aunt Bernice Nietupski; sister Rosanne Nietupski; cousins Mary Jo Nietupski (husband Rick Tritz) and daughter Bridgette Tritz; and Paula Post (husband Dennis) and sons Jacob and Izak. John was also blessed with countless loving friends.

Online condolences may be sent for John's family at www.gayandciha.com. A memorial fund has been established in John's memory. Funeral services and burial will be held at a later date in John's beloved state of Wisconsin in Jamesville.