
Sunday News

By BARBARA HOUGH RODA, Managing Editor – June 20, 2010



Photos adorning Bill Kepner's office at United Disabilities Services offer a clue as to how he'll spend today: with his family at a Father's Day cookout.

President of UDS for a year and the organization's CEO since January, Kepner, 53, was no stranger to the UDS mission when he assumed its leadership. He had previously served two stints on its board and brings a complementary health care background to his job.

Kepner's college major, however, was vocal performance, expertise he still taps as longtime choir director at Covenant United

Methodist Church.

Though he won't be singing today, his vocal cords will get a workout at the cookout as he is reminded, once again, that he's "blessed to be part of a very close family in terms of support, love and proximity."

Family: Married to Phyllis (almost 31 years). Three daughters: Allison, married to Gary Gregory, living near Annapolis, Md.; Rebecca, in Elizabethtown; and Kim, living in Orlando, Fla. Allison and Gary have blessed us with two grandkids, Emily and Evan.

Educational/professional background: Penn Manor High School graduate and B.A. from Juniata College. Thirty-one years' experience as an executive and a consultant working with large for-profit and nonprofit health care organizations.

I'd like people to know that UDS: Started in 1965. It is a not-for-profit organization offering a wide range of services that assist individuals in daily living. If you have a friend, family member or associate with a disability, you have some small understanding of the challenges they face on a daily basis. Despite tremendous strength and determination, each of them may have to rely on some help from others to live a safe, happy and independent life. UDS {udservices.org} provides that help through in-home personal care and caregiver support, independent living services and personal development and enrichment services.

What might surprise people about UDS: We have expanded our mission to include the elderly (lesser abled) and veterans, and we provide services to more than 2,500 people in 33 counties in Pennsylvania.

The most challenging part of heading a nonprofit in these economic times: Ninety percent of our core services are state funded so it is extremely challenging heading into each fiscal year beginning July 1 with the uncertainty of when a state budget will be passed, and what effects will it have on the consumers that we serve. Unfortunately, Pennsylvania is very fiscally challenged and it appears with the state pension issues looming next year it is going to be dramatically worse. We are very concerned about cuts to services and the creation of consumer waiting lists for vital services.

My dad always taught me: A tremendous work ethic and a deep commitment to his family. Until he became physically disabled with serious health issues, his jobs were physical ones that placed him in all kinds of weather conditions. He didn't believe in sick days. He worked long days and then would come home and work in our garden or with yardwork. He was a very unselfish and always made sure we had what we needed. He also never missed a game, play, concert or special event of his kids, and later, his grandkids.

I always tell my kids: To embrace life. Every day really is a gift from God to be savored and enjoyed to the fullest.

The best part of fatherhood: I love the many roles of guide, coach, confident, listener, persuader and life shaper. {My} daughters ... are totally different in looks, personalities and life views. So I could never use the same "book" more than once in helping them develop and grow. I must confess that one of my favorite parts was when one of my daughters viewed me as a bit clueless regarding guys when she was in her teens, and then admitted I was right on it when she hit her 20s. As I am now in my 50s, I am already seeing the pendulum shifting as my daughters worry more about my health and well being and want to take care of me.

Being a pop pop is different from being a dad because: Grandkids make you feel younger and more active as you do, or try to do, some things you may not have done for a long time or have ever done. Grandkids usually don't live with you so they don't see your flaws like the rest of your family does. They love you unconditionally ... they are excited to see you and to play with you and make you feel like a real hero. ... I love being a pop pop.

Three words that best describe me: Competitive, dedicated and fun-loving.

My favorite sports team: New York Yankees.

There's no vacation spot better than: My spot, Tampa/St. Petersburg in February – golf and baseball. Our family spot is Williamsburg, Va.

Coffee or tea? Coffee. Truly, one of my vices.

Best move I've ever seen: "The Shawshank Redemption." ... Its message: Fear can hold you prisoner, hope can set you free!

I find my inspiration in: My faith in Jesus Christ and his modeling of servant leadership.

High school athlete or thespian? I had the great opportunity to do both. I played football and baseball all through high school. Wrestled one year but when I got the lead in the musical "Oklahoma!" I bagged it to sing and dance. The wrestling coach was not too happy about it.

When I was a kid, I wanted to grow up to be: An oceanographer, another Jacques Cousteau. This was influenced by family trips to Cape Cod and visits to Woods Hole near Falmouth.

Steak or lobster? Steak, New York strip (medium rare).

A famous person I'd like to meet: Abraham Lincoln – tremendous person of character and leadership.

Something people might not know about me: I have been blessed with an uncanny ability to do numbers and percentages in my head, and I am addicted to Sudoku.

A TV show that I'm reluctant to admit I watch: A bit rude, "Curb Your Enthusiasm," a spin-off from "Seinfeld," which I also watched and still love the reruns.

My taste in music runs to: In college Jackson Browne, Dan Fogelberg and Tim Welsberg, but also Luciano Pavarotti. Current CDs are Jim Buckman, Harry Chapin, Vivaldi, Michael W. Smith, the Eagles and the Jersey Boys.

A very inspirational book for me: "Halftime," a great book by Bob Buford.

Pet peeve: Drivers going less than the speed limit and lanes closed for construction with no construction taking place.

I never leave home without: My cell phone. It connects me to everything.

If there's one thing I've learned in this life, it is that: Life is all about relationships and caring for others. It begins with family and friends and transcends to everyone we come in contact with.