



MARVIN S. GILMAN
SUPERSTARS
IN BUSINESS



SUPERSTARS IN BUSINESS WINNER

THE POWER OF A SMILE, THE POWER OF A BIKE

Nonprofit: Preston's March for Energy

BY KELLY BASILE | PHOTOS BY DICK DUBROFF/FINAL FOCUS



WHAT CREATES A SENSE OF FREEDOM for you? For a young man named Preston, freedom is achieved when he rides his bike. But Preston isn't just any young man and his bike isn't just a bike. Preston has Mitochondrial Disease, which causes low muscle tone, fatigue, and balance issues. His adaptive bike is designed to allow him to keep up with his friends and family.

"It was August 10, 2011. That was the day of Preston's first bike ride," shares Deb Buenaga, Preston's mother. "I will never forget that day."

The bike was donated to him through a local fundraiser. "The smile that was brought on through this bike made us determined to 'pay it forward' by raising money for more children to realize their dream of riding their own bike," explains Buenaga. With this goal in mind, she and her husband went on to create Preston's March for Energy.

The mission of Preston's March is to transform the lives of children, living with physical or mental disabilities across the country, who are deprived of the many health, emotional, and social benefits of physical fitness. The nonprofit raises both awareness and funds to purchase and deliver special adaptive bikes – each bike costs between \$1,400 and \$2,500 – directly to the children in need.

Nine years later, Preston's March for Energy has created and shared smiles through the gift of a bike 473 times in 35 states.

"There is an overwhelming need for adaptive, recreational equipment for children with disabilities," says Buenaga, "and the pandemic has shown it's

more important than ever for children to have the ability to go outside into the fresh air and exercise."

With most therapies cut or cancelled, the bikes Preston's March for Energy present help children achieve needed cardio and strengthening exercise, and in some cases, they can temporarily replace their physical therapy sessions. Moreover, the bikes provide an outlet and a way to connect with family and friends.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit earlier this year, decisions were quickly made in order for the organization to survive. With 63 children on their waiting list, it was decided to close applications and focus on finding a way to continue delivering bikes to those on the waiting list. With the help of a friend to Preston's March who is also a state representative, the organization received the Governor's "blessing" to visit each child's home and present the bikes while adhering to all safety and health protocols. With great pride, Deb and her team of volunteers presented 40 bikes to date during the pandemic.

When asked what it means to be a superstar, Buenaga reflects, "To me, I believe a superstar in business is one that goes out of its way to help the community, that goes above and beyond to fill a need. We strive to do this each and every day."

When asked how proud he is of Preston's March for Energy and their work in the community, Preston brags, "I like to see all the smiles and seeing all the kids ride their bikes!" ■