

2018 Conference General Session Speakers

This year's featured general session speakers will take on a local flavor with both coming from Chapter 3 and the greater Syracuse area. The opening general session on Wednesday morning will feature Tim Connors of Fulton, NY. On Thursday, the world-renowned David Casullo, another local, will speak on the topic of leadership. Below are the biographies on both speakers. The closing general session on Friday, will feature our own Robert Zayas, Executive Director of the NYSPHSAA, who will update all attendees on what's going on across the state.

David Casullo, President



David Casullo's passion is developing leaders who have the courage and capability to change the world. He is President of Bates Communications and the author of *Leading the High-Energy Culture: What the Best CEOs Do to Create an Atmosphere Where Employees Flourish* (McGraw Hill). Within weeks of its release in March 2012, the book became a bestselling book in Human Resources and Leadership on Amazon.com. Dave is also a regular blogger for the Conference Board.

David's methods ensure that leaders remember what is important by helping clarify values and recommit to behaving consistently, in alignment, with the "who that you are." He has a proven process to clarify organizational values and communicate them effectively in a way that drives growth and top and bottom line results. His experience as a successful business leader and entrepreneur give him credibility with executive leaders in the C-suite as well as with emerging leaders in key roles throughout organizations.

Prior to joining Bates Communications, David held the Senior Vice President of Human Resources role on the executive team for the rapidly growing northeast mega-retailer, Raymour & Flanigan.

For ten years his leadership helped Raymour & Flanigan become a billion dollar retail giant, the largest furniture retailer in the Northeast and one of the fastest growing in the US, with nearly 100 store locations in seven Northeastern states and 4,300 associates company-wide.

David began his career in management in 1984 as the Computer Operations Manager at a large Anheuser-Busch distributor. His desire to lead and to tackle tough business challenges head-on has led him on a path of increasing leadership responsibility throughout his 26-year career. He has served as General Manager and minority owner of a successful small business; he spent five years in Cincinnati, Ohio as the Vice President and General Manager of a large operating division of a successful paper and packaging manufacturing business, and became President of that same \$200 million multi-national business before joining Raymour & Flanigan.

David earned his Bachelor degree in Math and Computer Science from Hamilton College in Clinton, NY and earned an MBA from RPI in Troy, New York. He married his high school sweetheart together with whom he has three wonderful children. He splits his time between Wellesley, Mass. and Little Falls, New York.

Tim Connors

SYRACUSE, NY – This afternoon at roughly 1:45, Fulton native Tim Connors returned to his anxiously awaiting family after an adventurous two-week stretch in Africa.

Tim's mother, Betsy Connors was the first face at the airport terminal searching for her son and husband as they walked through the gate at Syracuse Hancock International Airport.

"I am just so thankful they are home. I'm so proud of them and all they accomplished and Tim's commitment to just keep paying it forward," Tim's mother, Betsy said.

Connors, 22, commonly referred to as [Tim Possible](#), beat a life threatening cancer diagnosis that left him blind as a teenager.

Two weeks ago, seven years after the battle for his life began, he traveled the 7,556 miles from Fulton to the Kilimanjaro International Airport in Africa to begin his trek to the top of the highest point on the African continent as part of his [MounTimPossible mission](#).

On his twelfth day in Africa, Connors and his team, partnered with K2 Adventures Foundation, reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro at 18,885 feet after 53 hours of climbing over a nine day stretch.

"I went through cancer and everything and this might be one of the toughest things I've ever done in my entire life," Connors said. "But we did it. I couldn't have done it without everyone on my team, they all pushed me."

Connors referred to the momentous journey as "out of this world" and "incredibly intense" though somehow finding the strength to never give up.

Today, Connors reunited with his service dog, Lang, his mother, and the rest of his family.

"It's what I've been waiting for," he said. "That's what I was most excited for – to have my dog run up to me and tackle me like he did and then to see my mom, who didn't have all the contact the whole time, but she's been with me the entire way. She's my rock in so many ways, she never left my side. I wouldn't be here without her."

Connors spent months training for the big journey, many times logging a 12-13 hour workout day with local personal trainer Leroy Collins, who Betsy said made the entire trek possible.

"There was a day really where we didn't think Tim would even walk. When he came home, he couldn't get off the couch, his father and I had to lift him. He was in a wheelchair, then a walker. We had to start from scratch all over again. So, everyone is just in awe of Tim and all he has accomplished," Betsy said.

In Africa, Connors and his team were led up the mountain by K2 Adventures co-owner, Kevin Cherilla whose summit with Connors marked his 30th time standing atop Mount Kilimanjaro.

Connors awaited his unique nickname that is sure to come with each adventure and laughingly found his byname to be "Polar Bear" for the immense amount of blonde chest hair he sported with his father rightfully falling suit as "Papa Bear."

Cherilla led Tim, his uncle, his father, Mike Conners and the rest of his team to the summit point as Tim finally realized his goal to fearlessly tackle Mount Kilimanjaro.



Tim Possible Facebook Photo

Tim Conners and his team stand together at the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa.

“It’s just amazing to watch what he’s been through,” said Tim’s father, Mike. “He was fighting different issues all the way up the mountain so he definitely had to fight more than the average person to get through. He really did great.”

Mike and Tim explained that while most people may assume being blind would be the biggest obstacle he faced, residual effects of cancer treatments including adrenal failure and issues stemming from former heart, lung, and kidney failure would prove to be big hurdles on their journey.

To summit Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest free standing mountain in the world, is no small feat. When considering some of these significant physical disadvantages that could deter Tim’s success, the likelihood to tackle such an accomplishment is only lessened.

However, for Tim Conners nothing is impossible, a mantra he feels so drawn to that he entitled his recently published book, “It’s Impossible Until You Do It.”

“It was always up to Tim. There was probably 4 or 5 times we all looked around and thought, this might be where we end it. But Tim kept proving us all wrong,” Mike recalled.

Ultimately, they pushed their way to the top, a feeling Mike described as “astronomical, beautiful, and unbelievable” and a feat that left Tim speechless.

To stand together at the top, sightless or not, left both Conners men with an immense feeling of pride.

“He was so proud of me because we’ve been through so much as a family together,” Tim said of his father as he became overcome with emotion. “To be there seven years ago and him to tell me ‘you have cancer’ to us standing at the top of the highest mountain in Africa, what a journey it’s been.”

For both Mike and Tim, it’s promised to be a moment they will remember for the rest of their lives.

Conners received a life-threatening T-Cell acute lymphoblastic lymphoma cancer diagnosis in his freshman year of high school at the age of 15.

The young student athlete's life quickly became one he could barely recognize full of hospitals, treatments, painful setbacks, and eventually a year in isolation.

The cancer had begun attacking his optic nerves. As this became immediate priority, just before he turned 16, Connors was wheeled to surgery in attempt to salvage what was left of his eye sight.

"It was hard. As all his friends were getting permits, he was going blind," Betsy recalled.

Waking up from surgery, he discovered he would now have to adjust to living in a sightless world.

Though blind, Connors remained grateful that he was able to do just that, live.

He received the bone marrow transplant he needed from the perfect match found in his older brother as his mothers says "the stars aligned."

From there, through positivity, strength, and perseverance, and with the help of his family, and several doctors and organizations along the way, after a scary and sometimes unsure recovery, he finally reached remission.

From that point on, Connors vowed to tackle the world as a blind young man with a new vision of life.

MounTimPossible is Connors' mission to give back to organizations he personally feels saved his life, to help those organizations offer the same life-saving opportunities to others who may find themselves battling a life threatening illness or disability.

He is raising funds for No Barriers USA, The Joe Andruzzi Foundation, The Upstate Golisano Children's Hospital, and The Michael Napoleone Memorial Foundation, Inc.

Simultaneously, Connors hopes his mission can inspire people across the globe to see past any barriers that may stand in their way and find the strength to "redefine possible."

"I'm gonna keep raising (money)" Connors said, adding that his fundraiser will remain open until August 31. "It took us 53 hours to get up there, if we had 10,000 people donate \$53 we would crush our goal and help so many children. That's what I really wanted for this mission was to help other people like I had been helped because they deserve just as many chances and opportunities to succeed as I had."

To read more on the MounTimPossible mission or to donate to the cause, visit MounTimPossible.com.