



COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo Photo by Niki Rossi Photography

Meet Chuck Oakes: Renaissance Man

Chuck Oakes knew from an early age that he wanted two things out of life: variety and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. His life journey so far has allowed him to achieve both of these things.

Originally from Long Island, Chuck enjoyed many days on their family sailboat. Being exposed to the yachting and boat community at such an early age provided him with the opportunity to learn about and appreciate fine woodworking, which has evolved into his love of rustic furniture, waterfeatures and playing handmade acoustic guitars today. Growing up, Chuck also enjoyed canoeing, hiking, photography and the Wild West.

At eight years old, his family relocated to Los Angeles after his engineer father was transferred for his job. It was here where Chuck experienced his first life-changing event. He went to Hollywood Bowl to see the Kingston Trio play, then talked his way backstage after the show to meet the band. He developed a friendship with the band that continues to this day. It was this show that inspired him to learn guitar and he quickly took advantage of the unemployed actors/musicians in the area who were looking to make a little money. He studied for about six months before he began performing – first solo, then as part of The Princeton Trio. His guitar teacher was from the Gateway Singers – a folk group famous for their song “Puttin’ on the Style” – and he arranged for the trio to play on the Steve Allen show.

Chuck’s passion for music was undeniable and became a prominent part of his life. It was a passion he wanted to share. He introduced his neighbor, Lee Ritenour, to the guitar as well and gave him his first guitar as a present. Lee went on to become an international recording artist and a renowned jazz guitarist. He remains

one of Chuck's closest friends to this day.

At 11, Chuck's family once again relocated back east to Connecticut, where Chuck continued with his music and entered the world of community theater and modeling. He graduated with a degree in business management from the University of Hartford, studying voice in between his business courses. After graduation, he continued to play steady gigs in local hotels while he pursued his acting career. He had modeling and acting assignments that found him on billboards, in magazines, and in commercials – most notably as the “Stetson Man” for Coty Cosmetics and as a guest on the *Kate & Allie* TV show.

As with any industry, self-employment in the entertainment industry is always a risky venture. Chuck says that it was “all-consuming, allowing for little else in one's life. Having high personal standards added pressure to my life. While I eventually had representation on both coasts, it took its toll. The constant pressure and expectations eventually affected my autoimmune system and I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (a continuing challenge). In the entertainment business, you ‘die on your own dime’... the show must go on!”

Chuck decided to tap back into his college education and redirect his career into Human Resources and the corporate world by first becoming a corporate recruiter. Later, he had a position with ShopRite in New England. His efforts there in hiring workers with disabilities caught the eye of President Reagan's Council on Hiring Workers with Disabilities and he received a phone call from a council representative. At the time, this was a relatively new topic and they were looking for more information. Chuck wrote a white paper for them and became an advisor

for the council.

He then began to focus on helping workers that lost their jobs due to corporate downsizing. He published his first book, *When the Pink Slip Comes Home* as part of a package that included a handbook and audiotapes. This new passion has followed him through the years and Chuck continues to work as an outplacement specialist and offers workshops and counseling for displaced workers.

The past 10 years brought Chuck into another new phase of his life as he became the primary caregiver for his aging parents. He learned many creative techniques to support his parents and enhance their home for their later years. Sensory supported elements became a focus to make the home a relaxing and supportive environment. These elements are “the acknowledgement of whatever active senses the residents still enjoy. Then, to assess and make improvements around the residence to make life safer, healthier and more enjoyable through the use and application of sensory supported techniques and devices, including waterfeatures, aroma devices, lighting, etc.” He subsequently published two books on aging based on his experiences, including his latest, *Your Home, Your Castle*.

These experiences also led to his certification as a Stephen Minister. “The Congregational Church in my town recognized my experience and commitment to our aging population and asked me to be a specialized trained expert on loss and grief. It fit with my overall career so in about eight months, I was commissioned as a Stephen Minister (an international, Christian position).” After his parents passed, he decided to move to the Capital District to be near his brother and nephews who live in the Albany area. He wanted a change – a time for



renewal and healing.

Chuck continues to write and has once again ventured into the entertainment business, playing his music on a limited basis and engaging in acting and modeling. He also continues to pursue his love of photography and focuses his work on ghost towns and historic railroads. His photos have been featured in exhibits, malls, restaurants and travel articles, and he gives presentations on related topics throughout the area.

Chuck has established himself in Capital District life, is on the Board of Directors for his community HOA in Clifton Park and in his spare time enjoys building rustic planters, garden railroads and riding his motorcycle. His motto, “Savor and enjoy every moment, for life can change in a heartbeat,” has carried him throughout his years from one adventure to the next as he continues to look for ways to help others along his journey.

To contact Chuck for more information on his presentations or books, visit his websites at www.chuckoakes.com (aging matters) or www.chuckoakes.net (programs and performances), or email him at Chuck@chuckoakes.com. ■

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