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Stefan Doering: entrepreneur extraordinaire

Accident victim turns hardship into an inspiring way to help others

BY PATRICIA SCHAEFER

"Thoughts become words, words become actions, actions become habits, habits become destiny," is a proverb Setauket resident Stefan Doering loves to quote. These words are the embodiment of Doering the man, the business coach and the accident victim who was left unconscious and near-dead last June.

With no memory of his accident, Doering said witnesses told him a vehicle nearly ran him down as he attempted to walk across a street in Park Slope, Brooklyn. Apparently, Doering then went over to speak with the driver and the driver swung his car door open, causing Doering to lose his balance. The driver then got out of his car and punched Doering in the jaw so forcefully, he fell to the pavement, breaking his skull. The driver took off, leaving the unconscious Doering bleeding in the street.

When he arrived at United Methodist Hospital, his brain was swollen and doctors had no idea if he would survive. After being totally unconscious for three days, Doering was — just four days later — brought back to his childhood Setauket home by his family. Barely able to walk, he lost most of his sight and a third of his ability to hear.

A little over a year later, Doering looks the picture of health. Six-foot-four inches tall with a trim build, he sports just a tiny negligible scar on his jaw as the last observable remnant of his near-death encounter. He is now physically well except for an occasional balance problem when he walks. Doering makes it clear that his accident has been nothing less than a gift, a gift that he would not return, even if he could. "Before my accident, I was totally about logic, results and hard work." When he lost his vision and hearing, he was forced to reflect upon his own mortality, fate and spirituality. "It's all about learning how to give. What can I give and contribute?"

Doering attributes much of his recovery to the group-coaching techniques he used prior to the accident. One group, called The Soaring Geese, is patterned after the natural support system of these birds. A head goose

breaks wind turbulence for the rest of the flock; when that goose gets tired, it goes to the back and the next one moves up.

"How this worked into my recovery," said Doering, "is that when one of the geese gets sick, two geese go down and stay with the sick goose. When I had the accident, the group visited me in the hospital. Afterward, we created a 90-day game around running; this when I could barely walk. My goal was to run five miles in Central Park on December 28, 2002." Doering did this with his family, friends and coaching clients rooting him on.

A 1982 graduate of Ward Melville High School and an MBA, Doering went the corporate route after graduation but left to start his own business after only five years. He was "disillusioned by how people were treated in the corporate world, as opposed to 'let's make money and still make sure our employees and customers are happy and the environment isn't being destroyed.'"

That dedication to environmental causes led to the start of his own unique and wildly popular general store called Earth General, which carried only products approved for their environmental impact. Earth General, which garnered worldwide media attention and accolades, opened its doors in 1991 and closed them in 1998, much to the public's dismay.

Today, he is a successful personal and business coach, and jointly owns an equally successful real estate company called Carpe Diem. He also publishes a coaching newsletter and is writing a book about the techniques used in his own recovery. "I just love making a difference in people's lives," said Doering. "The coach is there to help you find your blind spots that you don't see for yourself."

What first started out as a coaching business has evolved over the years into adding personal coaching, and, after his accident, another type of spiritual coaching he calls Checking In. Participants check in with themselves to look within their hearts and tap into their intuitions as opposed to assessing only logic and hard facts.

It is this very same checking in that Doering found to



Stefan Doering received a trophy after completing his 90-day goal of running five miles in Central Park.

beneficial in his own recovery when he became clear on what was truly important to him, like learning to trust his intuition and the value of family and friends. Not without a sense of humor, Doering joked that "there's nothing better than banging your head if you want lots of sympathy and lots of love, lots of people baking you cookies ... I tell you, it's the best thing." Hardly a year after his life-threatening accident, Doering has already found humor in what were disheartening times.