

## Living With Spinal Cord Injury

LEAP Board Members Megan Hammond and Scott Fedor share how they celebrate life after spinal cord injuries.

### What caused your injury, and how did it come about?



Scott Fedor

**Scott:** "I was visiting a Michigan vacation home and broke my neck after diving into a too-shallow lake. I swam there often but wasn't aware of how much the water levels had dropped that season. I knew immediately after entering the water that my life would change forever. I became a quadriplegic, or person affected by paralysis of all four limbs. As I lay in the ICU after my accident, I knew I had a choice to live or die. My doctors and family asked me if I wanted to be "let go", but I realized that I didn't want to leave my family. I told myself and the doctors 'don't give up'. I chose to live."

**Megan:** "I had always wanted to learn to ride a motorcycle. My fiancé offered me his '89 Honda Savage and a few basic driving instructions while we were visiting his family's property down in Holmes County, OH. I ended up at the bottom of a ravine with my spinal cord totally severed. The bike was way too big for me, and I lost control of it while trying to ride. I spent 32 days in the ICU at Akron General Hospital,

and I had no function or feeling below my waist. I had experienced a t-4 spinal cord injury resulting in paraplegia, or the inability to utilize my lower limbs. I would never walk again."

### Describe the steps of your recovery.

**Megan:** "I had extensive rehabilitation at Metrohealth Medical Center in Cleveland, attending therapy sessions five days per week, three times per day. The therapists taught me to ask for help only if I truly needed it, and to focus on what I could do, not what I couldn't do. My initial goal was to walk down the aisle for my wedding. When I realized that was not going to be possible, I tried to keep my focus on what I could do, like returning to my teaching job, and living independently in my own home. I was back in my classroom within four months of my accident, and also learned new personal routines at home. Thankfully, I'm able to shower, drive, work, shop, cook, and can do everything else necessary to live independently, without any outside assistance."



Megan Hammond

**Scott:** "After a six-month stint involving surgeries and extensive rehabilitation at Metrohealth Medical Center in Cleveland, I went to a nursing home for 14 months, learning to do everything over again. I was determined to leave the nursing home and find a way to live back in the community as an independent person. Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP) was there to help me with a range of valuable nursing home transition services, including relocation to my own apartment. Despite many challenges, I had to discover something deep inside myself that would help me to keep trying. I eventually found my primary motivation by setting small goals related to personal independence and trying to achieve them each day. I designed and built a home that meets my unique needs, and have resumed my career, working as a motivational speaker, author and director of my own nonprofit called Getting Back Up."

*Living With Spinal Cord Injury continued on page 3*

## Continuing the Legacy of Doris Brennan



Doris Brennan

Current stakeholders of Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP) may not realize that the organization's core mission and purpose flows from the life and legacy of our Founder and champion disability-advocate Doris Brennan. Doris was a Northeast Ohio native who experienced a devastating automobile accident as a teen, causing her to acquire a spinal cord injury. Doris went on to become a powerful ambassador for the needs and rights of people with disabilities, founding several disability organizations and spearheading effective state and national initiatives designed to bring practical supports, resources and public policy change to people affected by disability. Brennan was present at the 1990 signing of the historic Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in Washington D.C., and in 1998 she was the first Ohioan inducted into the National Hall of Fame for Persons with Disabilities.

*Doris Brennan continued on page 3*

## From the Director's Desk

**Spring is upon us here in Northeast Ohio, and with it, a new opportunity to “spring” into action on behalf of people with disabilities.**

I'm so proud to be associated with the dedicated board, staff and volunteers at LEAP, and observe first-hand the critical difference we make in the lives of people with disabilities every day. Spring also reminds me of just how important your continued financial support is to the success of the people LEAP serves, and how it has always made such an amazing difference in our ability to achieve our mission of inclusion and accessibility for all, regardless of disability.

Disability is something that touches 16.9 % of the Cuyahoga County's population, or 203,870 people. 29% of Northeast Ohio households have at least one person with a disability, and despite many existing supports, 25% of Ohioans with disabilities continue to live in poverty. LEAP impacts this reality by operating as a Center for Independent Living (CIL), a center for advocacy and action that helps to ensure that people with disabilities can continue to make their own choices and have access to a wide variety of programs and supports designed to help them live independently, and with as much dignity as possible.

Even more importantly, LEAP still strives every day to remain faithful to the vision of our founder, Ohio disability-rights

advocate and champion Doris Brennan of Cleveland, who set an example for all of us in her tireless efforts to advance the rights of people with disabilities and promote the philosophy of Independent Living, both here in Ohio and nationally. (Learn more about Doris Brennan on our cover!)

Doris was a tireless champion of public transit for people with disabilities. You may have seen that Greater Cleveland RTA has been in the local news quite a bit lately. I invite you to join with LEAP as we promote community dialogue and support an increase in funding for our public transit systems, that so people with disabilities can access the transportation they need to get to work, medical appointments and social activities that improve their quality of life. To learn more about what faces the users of Cleveland RTA, visit [www.facebook.com/CLEforTransit/](http://www.facebook.com/CLEforTransit/)

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our immediate past board president Brian Roof for his seven years of service to LEAP, and welcome Suzanne Bloomfield of ShurTech Brands as our new Board President. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I invite you to join with LEAP to promote a more inclusive and equitable society for everyone, regardless of disability.

Sincerely,



**Melanie Hogan**  
Executive Director

## Let LEAP Take You Out to the Ballgame September 20

Cheer on LEAP and the *Indians*®



Let LEAP take you out to the ballgame in honor of our 37th consecutive year of service to people with disabilities! We'll be gathering for a fun night at the Terrace Club at Progressive Field on Thursday Sept. 20 starting at 6 PM.

Enjoy all the excitement of Tribe baseball along with a buffet meal of ballpark favorites, silent auction and raffle, and cash bar. Settle in for dinner while watching the Tribe take on the Chicago White Sox beginning @ 7:10 PM. Tickets are \$65 each and include Terrace Club access plus individual reserved seat (upper deck) game ticket, buffet meal\* and non-alcoholic beverages.

*\*Included buffet meal available from 6-8 PM only; Terrace Club menu items and/or park concessions are available for additional purchase after 8 PM. Guests may watch game from the Terrace Club and/or their individual upper deck seat (ADA seating available for guests with disabilities per request) until close of game. Stadium parking excluded.*

**Buy early! Individual event tickets are \$65 until Fri. August 31; ticket price increases to \$75 per person from Sept. 1 to game date. Promote Your Business! Sponsorship packages including game tickets are also available ranging from \$100 to \$2500. Visit <http://bit.ly/LEAPTribe18> for details or contact LEAP: 216.696.2716 or [leapinfo@leapinfo.org](mailto:leapinfo@leapinfo.org)**

**All proceeds benefit LEAP and support a wide range of services for people with disabilities. Play Ball!**

## What are the biggest misconceptions about people with spinal cord injuries?

**Scott:** “That you have no quality of life. That you are miserable, and a burden to others. People can pity you, or act like you are helpless. But I don’t view my situation that way. Living with a spinal cord injury is like running a marathon with no finish line. It’s an incredible challenge, but you just have to keep going. There’s still so much I enjoy, so much I want to do. I work, I have hobbies, and I socialize with family and friends. I constantly strive to do more than I did the day before. Technology is a big help to me, at home and at work, allowing me to do more things by myself. My quality of life is very high.”

**Megan:** “The wheelchair makes people nervous. They don’t know what to say, how to act. They often talk over me, like I am not even there. Or they go out of their way to offer help, even though I don’t need it. I am sure that people care and that they mean well. But they project helplessness onto me, when I am 100% capable of caring for myself without any help at all. I’m always in a personal competition with myself, to see if I can be better and do more than the day before. I’ve had a lot of practice proving people wrong.”

## How did you become involved with LEAP?

**Megan:** “An email was put out to Cleveland’s United Spinal Chapter that LEAP was looking for more persons with a disability to be on the board. I looked up the organization and thought it sounded like a great opportunity to advance the cause of disability awareness.”

**Scott:** “LEAP assisted me with nursing home transition services after my accident, and when I was able to resume a role in the community, I decided that I wanted to serve on the LEAP board of directors. I invite others to join me in supporting the amazing mission of LEAP.”

### Doris Brennan *continued*

In 1986, Doris Brennan became LEAP’s first executive director. She had already established herself as a powerhouse in the Independent Living Movement in Ohio, and she brought the vision and philosophy of that movement to LEAP. Over the course of her nearly 20 years with LEAP, she led the agency as it became a federally recognized Center for Independent Living (CIL) and expanded services to address the desire of people with disabilities to live, work, and participate in their communities.

Doris was a true pioneer in the disability-rights movement and a tireless example of the Independent Living philosophy, leaving a powerful legacy of disability policy innovation, compassion and social change that has resulted in a more fair and equitable society for persons with disability.

**You can support this amazing legacy and help to keep the spirit of Doris Brennan alive by donating to the Doris Brennan LEAP Fund at the Cleveland Foundation: <https://bit.ly/2HEq5xa>**



### Mitchell’s Ice Cream Gift Cards:

Enjoy great Mitchell’s Ice Cream flavors! Gift Cards are available in \$10, \$15 and \$25 amounts, with 25% of your purchase coming back to LEAP. Order your gifts cards online and they will be mailed to you: [www.leapinfo.org/support/gift-cards](http://www.leapinfo.org/support/gift-cards)

Good at all Mitchell’s locations.

# Ways to Support LEAP

Most LEAP programs and services are offered free of charge, or at very low cost, to our hundreds of consumers.

As a non-profit organization, LEAP relies on the continued generosity of our program partners, donors and friends to support our work on behalf of persons with disabilities. Thank you in advance for using the methods below to help LEAP to advance a society of equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of disability.

### Donate Online:

Online gifts to LEAP can be made safely and conveniently at [www.leapinfo.org/support/donate](http://www.leapinfo.org/support/donate)

### Matching Gifts:

Many Northeast Ohio companies will match your donation to LEAP, effectively doubling your contribution. Please check with your employer to see if they provide matching gifts and request a matching gift form for LEAP to sign.

### United Way & Community Shares:

Don’t forget LEAP during your annual workplace giving campaigns. LEAP accepts designated gifts through both United Way and Community Shares. Simply write “Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP)” on the designation line.

### Planned Giving and Gifts of Securities:

For information about planned giving opportunities or making a gift of securities to LEAP, please contact our Finance office at 216.696.2716 Ext. 806.

### LEAP Annual Fund:

LEAP’s Annual Fund appeal is a great way to lend your support to vital programs for persons with disabilities.

The 2018 Annual Fund campaign begins online on #GivingTuesday, Nov. 27, and runs through Jan. 15, 2019. Watch for more details online, in your mailbox and on social media.

### Amazon Smile:

Your regular Amazon purchases can benefit LEAP through Amazon Smile, a charitable donation portal within Amazon.com. Simply place your orders through [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and designate LEAP to receive a contribution from Amazon based on your eligible purchases.





Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential

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LEAPLines is a free publication of Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP), a 501-c-3 non-profit organization dedicated to advancing a society of equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of disability.

For more information about LEAP services or to schedule an appointment, please contact us:

216.696.2716  
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www.leapinfo.org



## LEAP and St. Ignatius High School Partner on Sophomore Service

St. Ignatius High School students and close friends Michael Boehm and Griffin Hanna recently completed their sophomore service experience with Linking Employment Abilities and Potential (LEAP). This marks the first time that LEAP and St. Ignatius High School have partnered to offer community service opportunities for students. The new partnership was forged out of a desire by both organizations to create more mission synergy with their Ohio City neighbors.



St. Ignatius sophomores Michael Boehm and Griffin Hanna

Michael and Griffin's experience began with a disability assessment of the St. Ignatius school campus. Using prepared checklists, the students conducted a comprehensive review of various campus

buildings, walkways, entrances and neighborhood access points, to evaluate the level of accessibility for people with disabilities. The students were pleased to observe that apart from some restroom facilities and uneven sidewalks, the Ignatius campus is largely accessible.

Michael and Griffin's service experience also included a nursing home field visit to determine what is needed to relocate someone to independent housing through Ohio's Home Choice program. Michael and Griffin also helped LEAP to organize and catalog a variety of personal technology devices, complete research and compile a resource list on available smartphone and tablet apps for people with disabilities, and engaged in packet and binder preparation for LEAP consumers.

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*"This experience has definitely opened my eyes to how hard it can be for people with disabilities to live independently in the community. I don't ever want to take my own mobility and independence for granted."*

— Michael

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**For more information about volunteer or student service opportunities available at LEAP, call 216.696.2716 or [volunteer@leapinfo.org](mailto:volunteer@leapinfo.org)**