

Lifestyle

The right motivation

La Grange man sees success

By Wendy Foster

Correspondent

When Sean Stephenson looks in the mirror, "I don't see a 3-foot-tall person in a wheelchair," he said. "I see Tom Cruise. I see a strong, confident, sexy man."

The 22-year-old La Grange resident tells others, "If you believe something, you'll see it ... and all you need to do to change your belief is to make up your mind right now to do so."

Living by his motto that "believing is seeing," Stephenson is constantly working to hone his skills as a professional motivator. Four years ago he founded his business, having recognized his effectiveness at helping people overcome challenges and obstacles to make the most of their lives.

Stephenson draws heavily on his own life experience. His challenges started when he was born with a genetic connective tissue and bone disorder called osteogenesis imperfecta.

Having a very serious form of the condition, which is characterized by bones that break

easily from little or no apparent cause, Stephenson has had more than 200 bone fractures. The disorder significantly has stunted his growth and confined him to a wheelchair.

Stephenson launched his motivational-speaking business while still a student at DePaul University in Chicago. After graduating last spring with high honors, he devotes himself full time to his passion for inspiring others.

His efforts are divided among several related enterprises, including motivational speaking, coaching, publishing his Internet magazine and writing his second book. Stephenson said while his degree is in political science, he feels like he has "a degree in motivational speaking." He added, "Actually, I sometimes use the term 'elevational speaking.'"

Although some people think motivational speaking involves positive self-affirmations practiced in front of a mirror, Stephenson provides tangible techniques for achieving goals.

Stephenson's most recent audiences have included Hamana Health Care, Youth Against Violence Conferences in California and a group of national fraternities in New Orleans.

"I've spoken to youth group after youth group after youth group in grade school, middle schools, high school and at the college level," Stephenson said.

He is working on a yearlong program with Morgan Park Academy in the south suburbs. A series of workshops throughout the year will draw upon Stephenson's book, "How

YOUTH Can Succeed!" The work is a personal

development manual the entire student body is required to read.

Stephenson recently branched out into coaching, which he describes as "keeping people accountable while they're setting goals to get through big challenges." To enhance his credentials in this area, Stephenson recently completed course work he called "cutting-edge."

This summer, Stephenson became a certified hypnotherapist and also earned a master practitioner's license in neuro-linguistic programming through Bennett/Stellar University in Sedona, Ariz.

"Hypnotherapy and NLP go hand in hand," he said. "Hypnotherapy is used to get people in a state of mind. It's helping someone become extremely comfortable to go deep inside themselves and losing the rest of the world. It allows someone to talk to their emotions without any distractions."

NLP, he explained, combines psychology, physiology and linguistics, resulting in "the science behind nonverbal communication."

Stephenson stressed that while he is not qualified to "diagnose or prescribe," coaching with his newly attained skills often enables him to achieve what traditionally has been accomplished by a therapist.

"Classical training says that you have to talk about a problem for about six years, and if that works for you, that works for you," he said. "But I don't believe in mortgaging pain over a long period of time. Using these tools that I have, we're able to cut loose. I have seen phenomenal work ... I can help people get where they want to go."

He added, "I believe that everyone's attitudes and everyone's behaviors are built on experiences and, more importantly, on the meaning they've placed behind these experiences."

With hypnotherapy and NLP, "I can take people back to



Author, speaker and professional motivator Sean Stephenson of La Grange talks with his friend, South Carolina beauty contestant Stephanie Richardson, who is working with Stephenson on his upcoming book, "Prisoners of Appearance."

moments where they had an experience and reprogram the meaning behind what happened," he said. "This can then empower them to move on." Most of the coaching Stephenson conducts is done one-on-one over the telephone.

Last March, he launched his Internet magazine, Elevations. He explained the magazine, designed to help people take their lives to "the next level," includes interviews with politicians, fitness experts, relationship experts and people who have experienced great adventures. The magazine is available free of charge and can be accessed through his Web site.

In his admittedly scarce spare time, Stephenson is working on his latest book, "Prisoners of Appearance." The premise of the book, according to Stephenson, is: "If you're living on an appearance level, if you're attracted to people merely based upon their appearances, you'll continue to be trapped in really nasty relationships when the appearance wears off."

Collaborating with Stephenson on the book is his friend, South Carolina beauty contestant Stephanie Richardson.

"When either of us walk into a room, we both get discriminated against," Stephenson said. "We get pegged for what people think we're capable of. People think

that Stephanie gets everything handed to her on a silver tray. But she's aware that the paint is going to fade. This girl is for real ... She knows that everyone grows older, gains weight, changes."

Stephenson said his book will promote the idea that "we need to judge people way deeper than our physical structure, our appearance, our skin." He noted "Prisoners of Appearance" is particularly relevant in light of the racial profiling and discrimination occurring during the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on America. Stephenson hopes to interest a "big publisher" in his book, and also is looking to get a television series.

With America seeming vulnerable, Stephenson feels compelled to get his positive messages to the largest audience possible. He wants to share with fellow Americans that "anyone can transform their dreams into reality when they turn their obstacles into opportunity," he said.

"When you do that, you live an incredible quality of life. The way that you do that, in short, is to change the meaning of the experience. It's not what happens to you. It's the meaning that you place on it."

For further information, visit Stephenson's Web site at www.seanstephenson.com



Stephenson receives congratulations after his graduation last spring from Chicago's DePaul University.