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Dynamic duo

Saint Francis and 'Batman' team up for a good cause

Page 10

Courtesy photo

Lenny B. Robinson, known as Real Life Batman, is a Maryland man who visits sick children in hospitals dressed as Batman.

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Hero to the people

Saint Francis event honors Caped Crusader by bringing in Maryland's Real Life Batman

By AMANDA GABELETTA
agabeletto@altoonamirror.com

Saint Francis University is sending out the Bat signal and the Caped Crusader is on his way. BatFlash Week 2014 begins Tuesday in celebration of Batman's 75th birthday.

Kent Tonkin, instructor of human resource management/management information systems at Saint Francis University, came up with an idea for an event, which grew into something bigger, after seeing ads for the documentary, "Legends of the Knight."

The feature-length documentary by filmmaker Brett Culp is about "the uplifting true stories of individuals who have overcome devastating obstacles, unselfishly given to the community, and embraced their inner superhero because of their love of Batman," according to the film's website, www.wearebatman.com.

Proceeds for BatFlash — named for Batman and SFU's Red Flash mascot — will benefit the Home Nursing Agency's Healing Patch, a program for grieving children and families with offices in Altoona and Ebensburg.

"Batman directly connects to the Healing Patch," Tonkin said. "The Healing Patch serves kids who have suffered loss, and Batman is who he is because he suffered childhood loss."

Tonkin, who volunteers with the Healing Patch, has a personal connection to the character.

"As a kid, I loved Batman and after I lost my own parents I understood Bruce Wayne a little better and understood why he felt so misplaced and, like he had to find something to do with his grief. ... As I grew into a young adult, any time I had a bad day I would always imagine what would Bruce Wayne do. What would Batman do on his worst day, and that would be to channel his grief into his power. And that was my personal inspiration," he said.

Another source of inspiration for many is making its way to Saint Francis in a replica of the 1966 Batmobile, owned by Lenny B. Robinson of Owings Mills, Maryland.

Robinson, who is known as the Real Life



Courtesy photo

The Real Life Batman, a.k.a. Lenny B. Robinson of Owings Mills, Md., poses at his home. At left, Robinson greets a child.

Batman, is participating in events, including giving the presentation "Being Batman in Business" on Thursday and introducing the film, "Legends of the Knight," in which he is featured, being shown on campus Nov. 7.

Robinson was visiting sick children in hospitals while dressed as the Dark Knight for more than a decade before police pulled him over in 2012 to check his plates while he was driving his Batmobile. The police dashcam video went viral, alerting the world to his good deeds.

A media storm followed and Robinson soon found himself with an agent, a publicist and permission from Warner Bros. to be known as the Real Life Batman, he said.

For his first outing as Batman in 2001, Robinson, now the father of three grown children, and his son, Brandon, who at age 6 was

obsessed with Batman, dressed up as Batman and Rob and visited a Baltimore hospital, after getting permission first, Robinson said. His niece Lindsay, 9, has also accompanied him as Batgirl.

That fist gesture "brightened everyone's day, like he parking lot attendants and their staff, doctors and nurses, and as we made rounds going from room to room, interacting with kids and their families, something just happened," he said. "There's no rhyme or reason. It just happened. And when we left there after seeing every person you can imagine ... I knew we had done something I wanted to continue doing."

Robinson will also speak to business students during his time at Saint Francis.

The self-made businessman who worked day and night, seven days a week to grow a com-

mercial cleaning business he began in high school into a company with 300-plus employees, sold his business, but stayed on as president for a couple years before stepping down to concentrate on being Batman, he said.

As a businessman he was fair, but tough, which is essential, Robinson said.

"But the one thing that I speak about in various business classes is how to put yourself in the other person's shoes," he said. "And although it's a cliché, it has so much meaning, because putting yourself in another person's shoes and trying to understand what he or she is going through, whether it be an employee of a company, or a friend or a sick child at the hospital, that makes all the difference in the world. If you can understand that, if you can comprehend that, if you can understand the challenges they face day in and day out, it makes you a better person as a leader in the community and throughout."

After meeting Robinson, Tonkin hopes students learn "that you can be very successful in business and still be a good person and a role model to your community," he said. "He's sending a powerful message to our business students in particular as a gentleman who has been very successful in business and he chose to walk away from the money in search of a higher purpose. ... I think that's a lesson we could all learn from."

Tonkin said he hopes attendants at BatFlash 2014 have fun.

"Although we're raising funds for a very serious cause and we're increasing awareness of a very noble cause, people should have fun. There's nothing more fun than getting to meet Batman in real life," he said. "If people pick up a little bit of the history of the character along the way that warms my heart too, but the bottom line is fun and learning how to be a better person for your own community."

On the web: www.facebook.com/batmansfu

Mirror Staff Writer Amanda Gabeletto is at 949-7030. Follow her on Twitter (@AmandaGabeletto), Facebook (Amanda Gabeletto Altoona Mirror) and on her Mirror blog "House of Gab" at www.altoonamirror.com.



#BATFLASH2014

If you go

What: BatFlash Week 2014

When: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Nov. 7

Where: Saint Francis University campus

Admission: Donations accepted to support the Home Nursing Agency Healing Patch

Schedule of major events

■ 7:30 p.m. Tuesday — "The History and Spirituality of Batman" with Paul Girardi and Kent Tonkin, in the JFK Lounge

■ 8 p.m. Thursday — "Being Batman in Business," with Lenny B. Robinson, the Real Life Batman, in JFK auditorium

■ 5 p.m. Nov. 7 — Parade, featuring Batman, the Batmobile and the SFU Marching Band, through the campus mall

■ 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Nov. 7 — Lenny B. Robinson, The Real Life Batman Meet and Greet, in the JFK Lounge

■ 7:30 p.m. Nov. 7 — Premiere of the film "Legends of the Knight," in JFK auditorium