

Report by Mandi Hargrave in CottageCountryNow.ca on 5 Sep 2013:

## Introducing Mike Zavitz



## CIRCLE OF LIFE

(Photo by Mandi Hargrave)

*After being given a second chance at life early on,  
Mike Zavitz does what he can to give back.*

Huntsville Forester  
By [Mandi Hargrave](#)

MUSKOKA – From the moment Mike Zavitz was born he's been fighting to live and pushing his limits. His life has been a roller coaster of adventure.

"I was left in the hospital as a baby and I was there until I was three-and-a-half. I was very sick," said Zavitz. "One of my nurses and her boyfriend took an interest in me and took me home. Initially, they just thought they were taking me home and giving me a life before I died, but I didn't die."

With numerous stories of broken bones and mishaps, Zavitz feels fortunate his loving wife Janna is always by his side offering her support. The two met while working in a restaurant.

"The first time I saw her I said to a buddy, 'That's the girl I'm going to marry,'" recalled Zavitz.

He admits it may have taken him a while to win her over, but in the end he got his lady.

"I would go and visit her at work and take her candy and flowers; I just kept bugging her," he said with a laugh.

The two have been married for 20 years and have two children, Logan, 13, and McKinley, 11. They have a cottage in Oxtongue, where Janna's family has been cottaging for more than 60 years.

When not residing at their cottage retreat, the Zavitz family calls Pickering home. There, Mike owns a lawn sprinkler business.

"I'm not saving the world there, that's why I do these other things," he said.

Those other things include swimming about 24 kilometres across Lake of Bays in late August to raise awareness about organ donation.

In February 2011, Zavitz donated his kidney to a stranger as part of Hamilton's first four-way transplant. It was his way of giving back for the care he received for an ill infant.

Zavitz initially signed on to donate his kidney to an extended family member, but doctors discovered he was actually a better match for a young man, Jesse Hunt. In turn, Jesse's father Steve Hunt, who was prepared to donate his kidney to his son, agreed to donate his kidney to Zavitz's family member.

"I wanted to do more to promote kidney donation and to support Camp Dorset," said Zavitz.

Lions' Camp Dorset is a resort for kidney dialysis patients and their families, where patients can receive treatment and escape the stresses of every day life while enjoying Muskoka's great outdoors.

"Being a living organ donor is probably one of the best feelings, a piece of you is helping someone else to live," Zavitz said. "It changes your life when you do something like that."

Admittedly naïve in his goal to swim Lake of Bays, Zavitz put in a year of hard training and the whole event, Tied Together, had a team of 14 and raised \$12,000 and counting.

"It was much more than one guy swimming," said Zavitz. "It was something the community could really get behind. So many amazing people offered to help."

It wasn't an easy swim by any regard. Around the three-hour mark, Zavitz had a massive leg cramp and panicked. He thought he was going to drown. He pushed on and suffered a collapsed lung at the five-hour mark, but continued swimming. When Zavitz emerged from the water in Baysville his body temperature had dipped from 38 to 33 degrees Celsius. One more degree and his body would have lost the ability to warm itself.

Zavitz was more than happy to reach the shore and is already planning the next big fundraiser in support of Camp Dorset.

"The swim inspired a lot of people because I did struggle," he said. "People were emotional as I came in."

When Zavitz isn't recovering from any injuries, he enjoys skiing and mountain climbing. Swimming, for now, is off the list.

In his anything-but-dull journey, Zavitz has come to accept there are only two answers when someone asks for your help.

"You can say, 'Yes,' or, 'No,' and you'd be surprised what happens when you say, 'Yes.' You never know where that will take you," he said. "Life is made of a small group of people out there doing stuff and they attract other people that want to get involved. It always takes one person to get things started. But once it gets started, it's amazing how many other people want to get involved. I'm just lucky I can be that person that gets things started."

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