



VARIETY - THE CHILDREN'S CHARITY OF BUFFALO & WESTERN NEW YORK/TENT #7

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Variety is WNY www.varietybuffalo.org

The 2026 Variety Kids Telethon Chairman, Russell J. Salvatore!

Since his preteen years of peeling potatoes and shining spittoons Russ has always found his calling and passion in creating good times for others. Russ, along with his brother Tony, eventually took over the operation of their father's business and began introducing his ideas and dreams to the business. Together they watched as they took their fathers already successful business to new levels. In 1967, Russ took a ride east from Delevan, "all the way to Transit Rd.", where he found a small hot dog stand that was for sale. Dreaming of a new challenge Russ took a chance leaving his thriving restaurant on Delevan to start all over again, and he purchased the hot dog stand.

He quickly remodeled it and opened a small 8 to 10 table fine dining restaurant. He was the cook, dishwasher and waiter. After many years of long hours, hard work, and his growing passion for people, Russ was able to expand his restaurant several times to create the Buffalo landmark that is now Salvatore's Italian Gardens, a 100, 000 sq foot restaurant and banquet facility.

His drive again pushed him to develop the Garden Place Hotel in 1995. While the hotel was under construction however, Russ was faced with the devastation caused by a fire that destroyed his dream restaurant. After 40 years already in this very demanding business, many wondered if he would have the energy & drive to rebuild. Well, true to form, he never gave it a second thought! He had all the construction crews from the hotel move down to the restaurant and they immediately began reconstruction, as to fulfill obligations that Russ had to wedding couples and their reception plans.

The entire foyer, dining and some banquet facilities were affected by the fire. True to his "Love to Overdo it" style, the restaurant was rebuilt bigger and even more beautiful once his efforts were complete. He celebrated this accomplishment by hosting a dinner banquet for all the volunteer fireman and workers who helped him save his restaurant.

Work quickly resumed on the Garden Place Hotel, a project most local bankers told Russ would never make it. Their concern was a business plan that did not include either the presence of a national franchise to attract customers nor a contract in place for an experienced hotel chain to step in and run the operation, versus Russ's desire to operate it his way, as an independent. Well, six additions later, Russ grew his 40 room hotel to a beautiful 166 room hotel which now houses a beautiful courtyard, fitness room, meeting rooms, lobby lounge, exterior streetscape with gazebo and 25 luxurious suites.

In 2006 Trocaire College visited with Russ to get his feeling on creating a satellite campus in the suburbs to help bolster a struggling hospitality program. Loving the opportunity to lend his hand, Russ took "hold of the wheel" and in a short time built them their satellite campus on land he owned on Transit Rd. He then donated the new Russell J. Salvatore School of Hospitality at Trocaire, to the Sisters of Mercy, and classes opened for their first students in January 2008. An immediate success, a second ribbon cutting ceremony took place which was to dedicate the second story addition which was required to handle the increased enrollment demands to follow.

In 2008 at the age of 75 Russ did the unthinkable. He decided to start all over again and build another restaurant and hotel to put him back in the position he cherished as a gracious host and innovative restaurateur. Just six months after making up his mind to go back into the business he loves, Russ opened his new signature restaurant, Russell's Steaks, Chops and More, and the adjacent Salvatore's Grand Hotel. His new properties have already drawn national attention for Food Quality and Level of Service. The Restaurant is considered one of the premier steakhouses in New York State, and was named Top 100 restaurants in the country for 2015 and 2016. Salvatore's Grand Hotel is also making a name for itself. The hotel recently received a Talk of the Town Award, as well as top honors as the number 1 hotel in Williamsville for 6 consecutive years on Trip Advisor.com based on traveler's feedback.

It was here that you will now find Russ every day, greeting the many friends and customers he has grown to cherish over the past 60 years.

A true testament to really loving what you do, and more importantly "who you do it for", Russ was first to lend his hand to many causes. His proudest accomplishment was the creation of Patriots and Heroes Park. This three acre parcel on transit road was slated to be another strip plaza until Russ decided to purchase the land and provide the area with an "Oasis to reflect". The Park is home to a post 9-11 memorial, a Flight 3407 memorial, St Michael the Archangel, Purple Heart Memorial, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and a World War II memorial entitled battle of the Bulge and a Tribute to America. Everyday people can found roaming the park and enjoying this community gift.



Russ has also given up his resources and time to the benefit of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, MDA, WNY Heroes, Roswell Park, The Variety Club of Buffalo, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of WNY, Juvenile Diabetes of Buffalo, the Heritage House, Woman's & Children's Hospital, the Italian American Federation along with the local school districts of Lancaster, Williamsville, Amherst and Clarence.

Russ worked with the Olmstead conservancy to honor the fallen heroes of the war of 1812 by funding the replacing of two "marker" willow trees in Delaware Park. Russ started a relationship with ECMC when he broke his ankle about 5 years ago. He was astounded that the sick and injured had to pay to watch Television. Russ's Answer - new flat screen TV's for the whole hospital, including an agreement that no patient will ever have to pay for television service again. This past year he took his philanthropy to a new level by joining forces with the administration of ECMC in the drive to improve patient relations campaign. He again two years ago was called onto support ECMC's efforts by becoming the largest private donor to the hospital through his financial support thus creating the new orthopedic rehabilitation unit within the Hospital. And he didn't stop there- he so believes in the mission and direction of ECMC campus that he committed another Million Dollars this past January bringing his total investment in the hospital to 2-Million dollar

Russ continued his mission to help those in need by recently providing TV's and free TV service to every patient room at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and The Brothers of Mercy Rehabilitation center. And The new Woman's and Children's hospital.

He loves the city of Buffalo and could not picture himself anywhere else. A proud sponsor for many years of the city's New Years Eve Ball Drop, the Buffalo Jill's and the City's and Canalside's Fourth of July Celebration, Russ is very appreciative of the opportunities this community has provided him. For a number of years Russ was known to give the area a holiday gift by purchasing the remaining tickets to a Bills game- lifting a scheduled blackout and allowing fans and alike to enjoy a Sunday of Family and Football around the holidays.

He also lent his support to the Buffalo Zoo and Luna, the polar bear. Russ was a founding benefactor to step up and assist the Buffalo Zoo in their campaign to build a new habitat for their newest resident. In addition to a personal gift, Russ has written a book about his life and times in Buffalo and is forwarding 100% of the proceeds to the Zoo for this cause.

In 2015 his hometowns of Depew & Lancaster NY called on him to once again help. Lancaster needed assistance kicking off a district wide capital campaign to improve facilities at every school within the district. His generosity had the school district show their appreciation by welcoming students and parents to the new Russell J Salvatore Field House. In Depew, a tragic fire destroyed the very popular Boys and Girls Club. With his help the youth of both communities will now be enjoying a brand new, state of the art club that is so important in building foundations in our children today.

Russ's impact can also be felt Downtown Buffalo, as he wanted to lend his hand and leave his mark on the resurgence and future of the city he loves. Russ was one of the first to sign on with UB Medical to support the new Medical Campus Downtown and for his efforts was awarded with the UB Circle of Visionaries Distinction.

In 2016 the Heritage Centers of Buffalo approached Russ for a dilemma they could not face alone. The Board of directors reached out to Russ to help with the transition of a 60 year old school they recently had taken over from the Town of Cheektowaga. They needed his help to allow for a more accessible entrance for the children with special needs that the school enrolls. Not fully understanding the role that The Heritage Center plays in our community Russ paid the school a visit. He was so moved by the commitment of the faculty and he so recognized a need for a first class facility to help those students, who he felt, needed the most help educationally and physically that he not only redesigned every entrance to the school but built a new wing on the entrance to welcome the students and their families everyday to the center, that now services every school district in WNY.

It was the fall of 2016 when the board of directors of Kevin Guest House approached Russ with an idea for him to play a role in the recent acquisition of a neighboring house to the campus. In typical Russ fashion he immediately began to spearhead renovations and remodeling of the site. Reaching deep into his own pockets to expedite improvements, not willing for the year long idea of State Red tape for grants. Because of his involvement the site will begin accepting guests at the new Russell J Salvatore Hospitality House a year ahead of schedule.

In 2017 Russ entered the realm of Higher Education and lent his support to the education of our futures leaders. The Russell J Salvatore Demonstration Kitchen and Learning Lab at Buffalo State College was unveiled followed by the opening of the Russell J Salvatore Student Center at Niagara University. Both University's offer advanced degrees in Hospitality Management.

A US Army veteran himself, Russ's love for this country is an undertone in much that he does. This summer in his Patriots and Heroes Park, his most recent memorial to the Purple Heart has drawn national attention. A surprise visit by the National Commander of the order of the Purple Heart had Russ receive the highest honor bestowed by the organization. Russ's Veteran's Day salute to the country, involved a concert he sponsored featuring the Buffalo Philharmonic. Russ commissioned the famous Riviera Theatre to host this free concert for all veterans to show his appreciation to them. He followed up with the largest individual donation to the Buffalo Veterans Hospital when he purchased 10 new transportation Vans to get WNY vets to and from their appointments and hospital visits.

His efforts to make Buffalo a better place, along with his hopes to one day be remembered as the most appreciative person in the room, is all the motivation he needs, to continue to leave his mark on our community, a mark that eventually will touch us all in way or the other.

Russ plans on being there for our community as the years go by. He has pledged to continue to give back to the community that has supported him for 75 years. He has created the Russell J. Salvatore Foundation to continue his legacy of Philanthropy