

Alderman Edward M. Burke
Bearcat Ball
Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago
Saturday, November 10, 2007
Tree of Life Award

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Thank you most kindly for the introduction; and thank you most humbly for this honor - this beautiful *Tree of Life* Award. That it is given by the Associate Board of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago makes it a profoundly touching honor. That it comes from the heart and artistry of my friend Richard Hunt adds a special layer of meaning.

Marc Chagall once said – *Great art picks up where nature ends*. Could he have envisioned the miracle and hope that is so much a part of RIC's story here in Chicago? Could his artist's eye have seen into the future beyond time and understood the impact of RIC's work? -- I would like to think so. His career, Chagall never tired of saying, was to discover the meaning of life. Well, this is something that happens at RIC each and everyday.

Ladies and gentlemen – I am proud to accept this distinguished honor that is such a vivid expression of Chagall's artistry and yet at the same time so filled with the spirit of RIC.

In accepting, I must pay tribute to two remarkable Chicagoans whose lives are inspirations for me. Both join me at my table tonight.

The first is a man who's life has become synonymous with everything noble and hope filled here in Chicago – CPD Officer James Mullen, a person with whom I am sure you are familiar. Jim McMullen was shot and wounded by a gunman in 1996. And over the course of the past ten years Jim's personal strength, his extraordinary human character and his passion for life has made him a hero to others with disabilities as well as those of us who are blessed with good health.

I remember well the events of Jim's injuries, particularly the time he spent at RIC. I saw first-hand the remarkable attention and supportive spirit there that is so life giving. All of you who support the work of RIC truly have a hand in the work of God, in the affirming, life-giving, healing work of hope.

Jim later went on to become a correspondent for CBS2 here in Chicago focusing on the special interests of the disabled community. Today he remains a vital, inspirational Chicagoan whose life constantly challenges others to succeed beyond any disability. What would we do without him? I accept this *Tree of Life* honor tonight with Jim in mind – always teaching and always giving.

I also am mindful this evening of a Chicagoan whose life changed the future for young people with disabilities almost forty years ago. As a young woman Anne McGlone had a passion for teaching athletics and a deep love for children with disabilities. While working in the Chicago Park District her respect and admiration for those she taught gave the world the very first Chicago Special Olympics on July 20, 1968 – that of course was just two months after we were married.

In early October Anne and I were joined by our children and many friends in Shanghai, China for the 2007 Special Olympic Summer Games. More than 80,000 people filled the stands on opening night. Special athletes from more than 170 countries, some 8,000 strong, participated in the competitions. Standing there cheering as TEAM USA entered the stadium, it was not hard to recall those first games in Soldier Field when there were more people on the field than in the stands. I am delighted to say that Jamie Smith, a 16 year old Chicagoan brought home from Shanghai a silver medal in power-lifting.

So I also accept this *Tree of Life* Award thinking of Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke – who changed the way the world looks at children with disabilities; and the way these champions look at themselves. And of course I know how they feel – she has changed my life as well.

Emerson said it best – *The only way to have a friend is to be a friend.* This is the lesson of Special Olympics. It is the great lesson of RIC. And it is the great lesson of life. I think Chagall would agree! Thank you all very much.