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Post-cancer, David McCoy makes a comeback

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For David McCoy, 2016 is his comeback year.

McCoy, vice president and broker for Louisville-based Commonwealth Commercial Real Estate, is a triathlete and keeps himself healthy with a heavy dose of exercising that includes lifting weights, biking, running and swimming. He also loves water sports, including water skiing, and scuba diving.

“Water is one of my elements,” he said. “I love the ocean.”

So the otherwise healthy 57-year-old was completely blindsided when a routine physical led to a biopsy that would find the early stages of prostate cancer.

His doctor had taken extra precautions in ordering the biopsy because McCoy’s father had died of prostate cancer years earlier.

“I was crying a little bit, scared to death and didn’t know what was going on,” said McCoy, who started to clear his schedule and stopped taking on new business at his firm so he could manage the flurry of doctor’s appointments that came with the news.



WILLIAM DESHAZER

David McCoy is vice president and broker for Commonwealth Commercial Real Estate.

It was a roller coaster," he said, noting he sometimes felt defeated. "I was really pretty depressed for four to six weeks."

Fortunately, the cancer was found at a very treatable stage, giving McCoy time to research treatment options and consult with other physicians and specialists.

What he found was numerous types of treatments that could cure the cancer, but he was looking for a noninvasive approach that wouldn't sap his strength and potentially cause long-term damage to his body.

He found a proton-beam radiation therapy that was less-invasive than other procedures, but his insurance wouldn't pay for the treatment, which would have cost as much as \$130,000 out-of-pocket.

Back on the roller coaster.

As McCoy continued to weigh his options and find a preferable treatment, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in October cleared the use of high-intensity focused ultrasound, or HIFU, as a treatment option for prostate and other cancers. The procedure had previously been banned in the United States, forcing patients to travel to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean for treatment, McCoy said.

He went through the HIFU procedure in December and has been deemed cancer free, though he said it will take a few more months for his body to fully heal.

McCoy grew up in Louisville and graduated from Ballard High School before attending Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., where he earned bachelor's degrees in math and economics.

While at Vanderbilt, he worked as a computer programmer and systems analyst for National Life and Accidents before earning his MBA at the University of Texas in 1984.

He would spend a few years as a management consultant in Oklahoma City for Grant Thornton before returning home to Louisville.

At that point, he started handling the finances for his family's business, Brian S. McCoy Inc., which included owning and operating Twinbrook Nursing Home, hotel apartments and preschool center off Dutchmans Lane.

He would spend nearly 15 years in that role before he started itching for a change.

"I just needed to do something different," McCoy said. "(My family) couldn't believe I wanted to get out of the business. I just needed a change. I wasn't really sure what I was going to do."

Family friend and Louisville Realtor Tom Wakefield suggested real estate, which sounded miserable, until Wakefield told him the business is not about bricks and mortars but rather about people. And Wakefield knew McCoy was good with people.

Breck Jones, a principal with Louisville-based Hoagland Commercial Realtors, suggested commercial real estate in particular. McCoy would spend a few years working with Hoagland before he moved over to Commonwealth Commercial Real Estate, earning his broker's license along the way.

But he admitted the transition was rough.

"There's a learning curve there," he said. "It took awhile for me to get things going."

That included devoting a lot of time and research to understand the marketing aspects of the business and the nuances of dealing with different types of commercial real estate, as office, for instance, is much different than retail. But McCoy said he has put Wakefield's advice into motion and strives to keep people first in his role.

"If it comes to a toss-up between email or a phone call, make the phone call," he said. "If you can, get out and meet them in person."

Describe one way your real estate firm stands out from the pack and why.

There has been tremendous consolidation in the commercial real estate industry.

This trend seems to be accelerating and seems to be fueled in a large part by the consumer moving more and more to the internet for commercial real estate information.

In this era of depersonalization, we believe the correct response is to be more personal. We are talking about it regularly at our strategy meetings. Instead of doing everything on the internet and by e-mail, we are trying to spend more time on the phone or in person with our clients. We want to know them personally and we want them to know us personally too.

What was your most memorable real estate deal and why?

I've done some pretty interesting deals. I leased the (Citigroup) call center off Blankenbaker to Humana Inc. and I bought land in a very rural area of Kentucky at auction for Cemex.

But I have to say that my most memorable deal was the time I moved a house.

Back in the early 1990s when they were expanding the Watterson (Expressway), they condemned several houses. My dad talked me into buying one of those at auction and moving it. I moved it over in St. Matthews right by Waggener High School. Everyone in the neighborhood hated me. They complained constantly, signed petitions and wrote letters to the editor of the Courier-Journal.

One of the neighbors was a photographer who worked for the CJ and he took a bunch of pictures and they wrote a blistering full-page piece about the house. But then, when I had finished the house, it was one of the nicest houses on the block.

Ironically, the photographer came and talked to me about buying it. They were outgrowing their house and their house only had one bathroom. My house was like new and was larger and had all-new appliances. I guess it was petty, but I wouldn't sell it to him.

What is the biggest mistake you made in business, and what did you learn from it?

I had a really good buddy 20 years ago who was always telling me that the definition of a fool is someone who continues to do the same thing and yet expects a different result.

I always agreed with him but it took me quite a while that he, in his kind way, was talking about me. I don't like to quit or give up on things. I still don't like to. But I have learned that sometimes, you just need to cut your losses because you can't move forward to the future if you won't let go of the past.

What is one trend in commercial real estate you'd like to see end now?

We are in an era of business concentration. Part of that is simply adapting to new technologies, especially the internet. Video stores are gone; music stores are gone; book stores are on their way out too.

It is getting harder for small local businesses to succeed.

This trend is reinforced as governments on all levels increase regulations and taxes on businesses and as landlords move more and more toward wanting national tenants for more security. Part of that is just evolution, but I hate to see the loss of diversity in the business sector.

How has being a cancer survivor affected your outlook on life?

Actually, (as I am writing this) it is one year to the day that I was told that I had cancer. It's hard to describe what that feels like. It's an upheaval of emotions. I was so scared and I was also profoundly sad. I still get emotional when I think about it. I remember thinking, I really am going to die one day. But then as I went through this journey, something unexpected happened.

Friends and family of course were there for me. But acquaintances and even strangers who never met me, went out of their way to contact me and offer love, support and advice. It was really overwhelming. Many of those people became good friends.

You can't experience that and not realize that the world is full of amazingly kind and generous people. So I feel a great sense of responsibility to help others who are facing cancer. It's a debt so large, I can never repay it. I only hope in

some small way to pay it forward.

How has battling cancer influenced your approach in your professional life?

While I hide it pretty well, traditionally, I have always been a worrier. When you find out you have cancer, you realize all those worries are pretty minor.

You also realize that you aren't going to be around forever. So, in that sense, I have become more focused and aggressive in trying to achieve the things I want to do, because I might not be able to do it later. I frequently ask myself, 'What are you waiting for?'

How many triathlons have you competed in, and what is your typical training routine?

My first triathlon was the (E.P. "Tom" Sawyer State Park) sprint triathlon. Then I did another sprint in Bowling Green.

And then I made the jump and did a half Ironman in Muncie (Ind.) and a full Ironman here in Louisville. I've done four marathons, several century bikes (100 miles) and last year I did the Ride Across Indiana (RAIN), which was 162 miles.

Last year was supposed to be my come-back year because I had a knee replacement in 2014. But of course, then I found out I had cancer. I was still planning on Ironman Louisville again last year but I ended up in the hospital for a week and had to withdraw.

My training regimen depends on what I have going on. Right now I am still healing somewhat from my cancer procedure, so I have not been doing a lot of cardio. I typically lift weights for about an hour to an hour and a half five days a week and swim once a week. For a full Ironman, the training builds up to about 16 to 20 hours of exercise a week. Usually that consists of running (or walking) twice a week, biking two or three times a week, swimming two or three times a week, weights once a week, and yoga once a week (if I can fit it in). That is scheduled over six days. Several days are two workouts a day. Then one day off and that day is sacred. Absolutely no exercise on that day.

What is your favorite city to compete in for a triathlon and why?

It has to be Louisville. It's nice to have a hometown crowd and we have one of the most exciting finish lines of any of the Ironman races. Also the people of Louisville are great in their support of these events. I believe they have approximately 2,000 volunteers to help with the race, and the course is lined with supporters cheering you on.

In fact, if I'm not mistaken, the Louisville Ironman race was the largest one hosted in North America last year. Still, I might want to try out the one in Cozumel (Mexico) or Brazil some time.

What superpower would you adopt if you had a choice?

My superheroes are made of real flesh and blood.

Steve Cooper, a veteran fighting prostate cancer who has done four Ironman races, one of which while he was on chemo, and who reached out to me in some of my darkest times even though we had never met.

Drew Hilliard, a young navy veteran, who died of cancer last year but in spite of his own disease, spent a good amount of his time raising money for cancer and helping others with cancer.

Derek Fitzgerald, affectionately known as the Tin Man in triathlon circles, who survived cancer only to have his heart destroyed by the chemo.

Then he had a heart transplant, and has since done several full Ironman races and multiple endurance races to raise money for cancer victims and research.

I know several more. In all of these cases, their superpower is a combination of courage, compassion and generosity.

That's the superpower I want to have.

David McCoy

Vice president and broker, Commonwealth Commercial Real Estate

Hometown: Louisville

Neighborhood: Springhurst

Family: Three children, Jason McCoy, 32; Virginia Leonard, 30; and William McCoy, 25; and two grandchildren, Emily McCoy, 9; and Gregory David Leonard, 2

Education: Bachelor's degree in math and economics, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn., 1980; MBA, finance and information systems, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1984

Work history: Agent, associate broker, vice president and broker, Commonwealth Commercial Real Estate, Louisville, 2005-present; real estate salesperson, Hoagland Commercial Realtors, Louisville, 2002-05; chief financial officer, Bryan S. McCoy Inc., Louisville, 1988-2001; management consultant, Grant Thornton, Oklahoma City, 1985-88; computer programmer, programmer analyst and systems analyst, National Life and Accident, Nashville, Tenn., 1980-82

Hobbies: Competing in and training for marathons and triathlons, spending time outdoors, traveling, studying different languages and cultures, participating in water sports and scuba diving

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