

I AM TRUGPN.

Class of 1982 graduate adapts to the unexpected in his career path and in life as a father

By Izzy Ellery
LIFE EDITOR

If Ted Coutilish's high school self could have seen his future, he would have been a little surprised.

"I wouldn't believe it. I didn't know what to expect when I left high school, but I didn't expect the life that I have. I thought I would be a professional journalist somewhere, covering sports teams — someone more like Mitch Albom than where I am today."

Coutilish always dreamt of becoming a journalist, but plans change. After realizing that sports journalism wasn't where he belonged, he entered the world of marketing. He currently works as Associate Vice President of marketing at Eastern Michigan University. There, he has helped launch the "TRUEMU" campaign.

"I'm comfortable at where I am today: the university," Coutilish said. "I feel I'm in a great position. We are experiencing record enrollment growth for the second year in a row, which is great. Our numbers are great overall, and we're getting a lot of students to consider EMU, and that's what you want to from a marketing perspective. That's my main focus, is to get more students to recognize and consider EMU."

Coutilish loves the central purpose of marketing and has seen firsthand the effects it can have.

"We enjoy relationships. We enjoy stories, and that's what marketing is about, sharing the key messages of the university to key audiences in different ways," Coutilish said. "I'm very proud of the team that I work with and the work that we do, and I think that as you can see with the 'TRUEMU' campaign, it's been very successful on many fronts; certainly prospective students have responded to it."

Coutilish's success may seem surprising, considering that he didn't get a degree in marketing and had never taken a marketing class before.

"I did not get a marketing degree, so I'm almost self-taught, but I've had some very outstanding mentors along the way that help me learn, and I think you can learn things you don't always have to learn in college," Coutilish said. "What college taught me to do was learn how to learn. Once you learn how to learn, you can apply that to anything. I always say: never refuse to learn."

Coutilish has seen success in other areas of his life as well. His son Andrew is affected by Fragile X syndrome, a genetic condition caused by changes in the X chromosome, which results in intellectual disabilities, behavioral and learning challenges. Fol-

lowing his son's diagnosis, Coutilish and his wife Mary Beth have immersed themselves in efforts to raise awareness of the disorder.

"Number one, I think, is just using my marketing communication skills. I'm chair of the Communications Committee for Fragile X Foundation, and the foundation looks to me for guidance on branding, marketing, advertising, communications. I feel that those are important roles I can play in terms of communicating and in positioning the foundation," Coutilish said. "The second role I play is a board member to help with governance and critique and review issues that come up and help people and help the board look at different ways to communicate and make decisions."

While Coutilish's efforts are more focused on the national level, his wife Mary Beth uses her background in counseling to help other families affected by Fragile X Syndrome at the local level.

"You're signing up to a group that has emotional attachments, and a diagnosis like that also comes with a lot of questions," Mary Beth said. "I know how much I was helped by the first people that spoke with me and gave me the assistance they could. I enjoy helping others through that process. It's a non-paying job, but it's a pretty important job."

Their son's diagnosis was a curveball for Coutilish and his wife, but Coutilish sees how positively his son has impacted his life.

"My favorite role in life, by far, is father. As difficult and as challenging as being a father to a child with special needs is, I know this was done for a reason, to make me a better person," Coutilish said. "I think it was all done for a purpose. I work hard in Fragile X Foundation because I wanna help other kids like him."

In attempting to help others affected by Fragile X, Coutilish realized that Fragile X had actually helped him.

"I would not have thought I would have a child with special needs, and the one thing that surprises me is how much patience Andrew has taught me because I was not a patient person growing up, and I would be the first to admit it, and now I'm a much more patient person, and my love for him is beyond what I could comprehend when I left high school," Coutilish said. "I think President Obama said it best when he said that having a child is like having your heart walking around. That's what it's like, and you wanna protect it and see it do well."



COURTESY OF COUTILISH FAMILY

"He can't speak, he's really affected by Fragile X Syndrome, and yet we communicate in many ways, the most important way we communicate is with love. I have love for him. He has love for me," Coutilish said of son Andrew.

Dividing his time between work, parenting and his efforts at the Fragile X Foundation and International Association of Business Communicators (where he used to be president and is still a member) takes a toll on Coutilish. The drive from Grosse Pointe to Eastern Michigan University is an hour long and is especially bothersome in the winter. But he can't imagine living anywhere else. Grosse Pointe is his home, which is what makes this award so special to his family.

"He's been a part of the community since he was just a few years old, and although I didn't move to Grosse Pointe until I was in my late 20s, I think both of us were definitely eastsiders," Mary Beth said. "To have a community award like this is a real honor and makes you feel like your family is even more a part of the community."