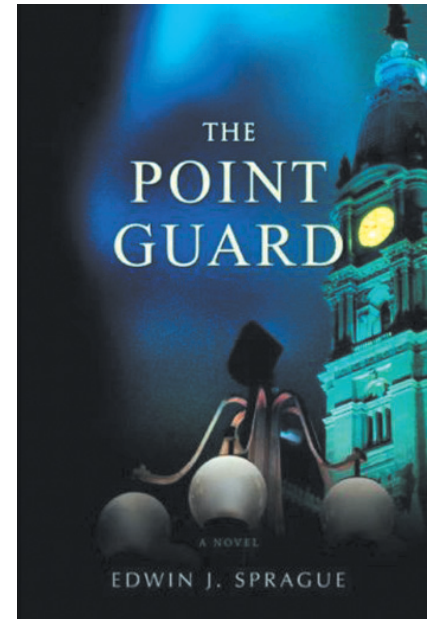


CEO takes on life goals, from athlete to author

By KATHLEEN KEANE, Special to the Local News

When Edwin J. Sprague was a kid growing up in a rowhouse in a working-class neighborhood in Southwest Philadelphia, he had several high-flying ideas about himself and what he wanted out of life. "I decided early on I wanted to achieve a handful of goals and I knew exactly what those goals were," says the movie-star handsome 48-year-old Sprague. He counts them: a professional football player, an inventor, a CEO of his own business and an author. And he did it all. One goal at a time.



Too full of ideas and energy to sit in a classroom and listen to others teach him the way of the world, he quit Widener University after one year, worked in the construction business for a while and decided to form his own company. But the capitol wasn't there, so he did the next logical thing for a young man with unlimited belief in himself. He put goal No. 1 on the back-burner and went about accomplishing goal No. 2.

He tried out for the New York Jets. He was signed as a free agent for \$45,000 a year when he was 22 years old. He did it without an agent, the proper schools, or any athletic connection whatsoever. He phoned every professional football stadium in the country, requested to speak to the director of player personnel, then asked when tryouts began. In most cases, he was told to take a hike, but the New York Jets gave him a chance, then a contract and sent him to training camp. His inexperience as a pro player collided with his ego, and the dream crashed in the form of a hamstring injury. That was the beginning and end of his professional football career. But not the end of his dreams.

A perpetual optimist who never wavers in self confidence, Sprague is a present-day Renaissance man, a man without the slightest doubt in his ability to achieve his goals. "I never wanted to be just ordinary, and I never wanted anyone else to define who I am," he says. He had one real job in his life. He worked for 11 months as a nuts and bolts salesman for his father's friend in Exton. "I was told to meet a quota, and to approach a major corporation nearby that had never purchased our nuts and bolts," he recalls, laughing. "Of course, I had never sold a thing in my life, and had not a clue as to how to sell, especially something I knew nothing about. "I didn't own a suit or a briefcase, so I called the purchasing agent, told him who I was and that I had a quota and I knew he did not purchase from our company, but if he allowed me to come over and at least take a photo of him and me together, my boss would know I really tried, and I promised I would never call him again. So I bought a cheap brief case, put a Tastycake and my camera in it, and met with the guy. "He asked about our line of products and of course, I didn't have a clue, then he asked what I had in my attaché case, and I told me my lunch and the camera, he asked to see, I opened it, and he sat back and laughed and laughed. "I walked out of that meeting with a \$60,000 order. I had met my quota and exceeded it. On just that one account." Charm and ingenuity go hand in hand with Ed Sprague.

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from athlete to author (cont'd)

He eventually became the CEO of his own business, an award-winning inventor of golfing accessories and is now is the No. 1 seller of golf accessories in the world from his corporation, American Newline Corp., in an Exton industrial park. When it came time to achieve one more goal, to write a book, Sprague never followed any rules. He never took a creative writing class, never graduated college, doesn't know a thing about journalism and never joined a writers group. "I looked into joining one of those groups, and found out all they ever did was talk about writing, not one of them had anything published." What he did was pick up a pencil and paper and began to write. The impetus was the original O.J. Simpson trial and its attending media circus. "Everyone who had a role in that trial became a 'celebrity,' a 'personality.' What about the law? It was a fiasco," he says. "I watched the O.J. Simpson trial. I believe he got away with murder. There were so many loopholes in the law. That's what motivated me."

He wrote for 13 years, until he was finished. In between he ran his businesses, married and had children. He has a stack of rewrites that stand taller than himself. He wrote 70 pages in longhand, realized he might have something and taught himself to type. In June 2007 he was finally finished. "The publishing world is not looking for another novelist, that's a reality, but I can't allow reality to steal my thunder," he said. He did what he always does; he did it himself. When you've run your own businesses as long as Sprague had, you know if you have a good product or not. "I knew it was commercially viable," he says. He and his wife, Jo, searched the Internet, and found iUniverse, a self-publishing house in Nebraska. So, with a few thousand dollars in start-up money, he published his first book. Ed, is out there, selling the book himself.

Edwin J. Sprague — pro football player, inventor, CEO, and now, author — came up with a potboiler of a political thriller called "The Point Guard." The story, which takes place in Philadelphia, centers on an accountant, Mike Lane, whose wife has been brutally murdered. The loopholes in the law allow the vicious killers to avoid facing trial. Mike then composes a revolutionary document, based on a point system that has the potential to radically change the very core of the American justice system. He asks his client, a corrupt senator to help him further his work; not realizing the senator has his own agenda. When the senator tries to pass off Mike's document as his own, Mike finds his own life in grave danger. Sprague says he has sold more than 1,000 copies since the book was published late last year. It's available in all local bookstores and at Amazon.com .

"People ask if the characters are based on real life," he said. "I always tell them it's a novel, a piece of fiction; however the character of the cop is modeled on one of my dad's best friends, an old time Philly cop during the Rizzo years. Most old timers in Philly law enforcement would recognize his name." Never tortured with self doubt, he has the ultimate confidence in himself. In order to succeed, Sprague believes you've got to know why you want to do something then you can always figure out how to do it. "I've always had an emotional reason for accomplishing another goal." Sprague wants to continue to write, another book is percolating in the back of his mind. He hopes to option "The Point Guard" to the film industry. "I see Bruce Willis as the main character," he laughs.

Before the age of 50, Sprague had accomplished the goals he set for himself as a young boy from South Philadelphia. But now, he has another goal, one not included in the original handful. And that is to pass on his experiences to a new generation. "I would love to become a motivational speaker, going into the schools to share my story with them, and to inspire them to know that they really can accomplish anything they set their minds and hearts to do." He would like kids to grab on to his mantra: "I believe it can happen."

It's possible Edwin J. Sprague will soon be on the speaking circuit, motivating kids to have confidence in themselves, to believe in their goals and to make them happen.

Just as he did.