



Western Pa. nonprofit founder recognized by Disney as one of 50 nationwide ‘Magic Makers’

‘the good they’re doing’



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When a company that claims to run on magic is recognizing you as a “Magic Maker,” you must be doing something right.

It’s not like Ian Coyle, 35, of Shaler, started the nonprofit [Semper Gratus](#) — Latin for “always grateful” — for the accolades. Mr. Coyle’s 6-year-old organization mainly focuses on supporting pediatric patients suffering from cancer and other debilitating diseases. That could entail everything from raising money for individual disease-combatting foundations to helping out with home renovations for the family of someone who recently died of leukemia.

He may not be in it for the potential rewards, but Mr. Coyle was recently discovered by Disney as part of its nationwide search for “Magic Makers”

and selected as one of 50 such do-gooders who will be receiving a trip to Walt Disney World Resort in Florida and a one-year subscription to its Disney+ streaming service.

“Speechless, humbled,” Mr. Coyle said of his reaction when he found out he was a Disney Magic Maker. “A little bit indifferent. I don’t do this for the recognition. I do this to try to create opportunity and positivity and some sense of togetherness amongst a community of people. For me, none of this is about receiving anything in return. What excites me the most is the recognition for Semper Gratus, not necessarily for me.”

From late June to early October, Disney solicited nominations from all around the country for its Magic Makers contest that was intended to “celebrate the individuals who make everyday magic a reality,” John Breckow, director of corporate citizenship for Disney Parks, Experiences and Products, said in an email. The company created [an interactive map](#) spotlighting some of its Magic Makers, including Mr. Coyle.

Mr. Breckow said that of the almost 30,000 nominations this contest received, 5% came from Pennsylvania, the fifth-highest percentage behind California, Florida, New York and Texas. The 50 winners were determined based on who Disney believed most impressively displayed the concepts of action, inspiration and courageous spirit, Mr. Breckow said.

Mr. Coyle exhibited all those traits through his work with Semper Gratus, particularly through the more than \$100,000 his nonprofit has raised for organizations like the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, and Muscular Dystrophy Association, Mr. Breckow said.

“Ian’s story was inspirational because he works so tirelessly to make his community a better place ...,” he said. “Ian exemplifies what it means to be a Disney Magic Maker.”

Mr. Coyle is a Leechburg native who attended Allegheny College and is currently the director of business development for the Pittsburgh-based technology company Data Ideology. He also maintains a side hustle as a wedding DJ under the name DJ Cai Entertainment while also running Semper Gratus.

In Mr. Coyle’s eyes, Semper Gratus should be viewed as “a general do-good organization” that’s there to help Western Pennsylvanians in need.

“While we focus on pediatric patients, I don’t want to get in the way of just helping people, period,” he said. “If your house burns down, why does our mission have to get in the way of helping you if we have the means to do it? At the end of the day, if we can be the platform to inspire others to be kind and live through action, we’re doing good.”

Semper Gratus has grown to the point where it now holds an annual St. Patrick’s Day fundraising event every year that consists of a “Shamrock Shuffle” 5K and 1-mile family-fun walk followed by a dance party called Small Town. Loud Voice. It has received support from more than 60 businesses since its inception that include Pitt-Ohio, PPG, Walmart, Dick’s Sporting Goods, State Farm and Allegheny Technologies, Mr. Coyle said.

The nonprofit also provides unforgettable experiences for ailing children, such as surprising a 3-year-old leukemia patient with a truckload of Walmart toys and a trip to Disney World. Now that Mr. Coyle will be heading down to the Most Magical Place on Earth as well, he’s hoping she will give him tips for what to do during his stay there.

Though he hasn’t been to Disney World since he was quite young, Mr. Coyle said that his first-ever memory is the flight down to the Florida theme park. It’s still wild to Mr. Coyle that Disney found him and Semper Gratus in its expansive search for Magic Makers.

“It’s amazing to have a brand like Disney recognize there are Magic Makers out there not seeking time and attention,” he said. “Disney’s making the initiative to highlight them and the good they’re doing.”

He isn’t sure yet when he’ll be heading down to Disney World, but he’s more excited that having his story and nonprofit highlighted by Disney will hopefully inspire others to give back to their communities.

“Semper Gratus isn’t about me; Semper Gratus is about you,” he said. “It’s the community that makes Semper Gratus. I’m just the facilitator, but it’s everyone else’s work that motivates others. The magic of Disney is that seeing is believing. I want everyone who attends our events to walk away, take that kindness and pay it forward in some other way.”

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