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Shining Example

Charles Frederick, owner-operator of **CJ Outdoor Lighting**, relies on hard work and ambition to strive for success in all aspects of his life.

by **BILL DONAHUE** photography by **JODY ROBINSON**

Charles Frederick tends to root for the underdog in almost every circumstance. After all, he's someone who came from modest beginnings, and used a combination of hard work and sheer will to become a successful entrepreneur and a respected leader in local home-improvement circles. In other words, he knows a thing or two about underdogs.

Hardnosed and ambitious, Frederick came of age in a pleasant Delaware County neighborhood. He developed a strong work ethic early on, starting with his first job, in which he had to rise before the sun to deliver newspapers to his neighbors. He later cut his teeth in the retail and hospitality sectors, where he cultivated valuable lessons that would serve him well later on in life.

"From the beginning, I've never asked for anything from anyone," Frederick says. "I worked hard, did the job right, and delivered a good product, because that's what you're supposed to do. I never burned bridges—I still don't."

This no-nonsense approach guided him as he made a name for himself in the home-improvement business. He has since become a major player in the Philadelphia area's "green industry," as he calls it, referring to aspects of home improvement that include low-voltage outdoor lighting, irrigation, masonry, landscaping, and hardscaping. He began his career on the irrigation side of the business, a craft he mastered, and then progressed into outdoor lighting.

Today, as the owner-operator of CJ Outdoor Lighting, Frederick uses his specialized expertise to add beauty and security to each homeowner's property—everything from verandas, pool areas, and gazebos, to driveways, landscaping, and home foundations. Just as he did earlier in his work life, he built and nurtured his business through a combination of ingenuity, integrity, and old-fashioned sweat equity.

"I believe you get what you pay for," he says. "When it comes to outdoor lighting, I'll be your first call and your last call. When you hire me, I do the estimating, I do the design, I do the installation, and I order my own material. I do everything from A to Z, and I never subcontract anything out."

He suggests that low-voltage outdoor lighting offers a number of benefits—greater efficiency based on the lower energy consumption associated with LED bulbs and fixtures, increased safety after dark, and enhancement to a home's curb appeal for prospective buyers, thereby driving up the home's resale value. Also, because outdoor lighting increases the safety and security



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of a home, it has the potential to lower a homeowner's insurance premiums.

Getting Things Done

Frederick believes his reputation as a man who "gets things done" explains why professional property managers and homeowners' associations keep his phone number so close at hand. It's also why so many of his fellow home-improvement entrepreneurs call on him to bring his expertise to job sites that require his particular area of specialty.

CJ Outdoor Lighting focuses largely on Main Line communities such as Bryn Mawr, Devon, Gladwyne, Haverford, Newtown Square, Villanova, and West Chester, though Frederick has completed low-voltage lighting installations throughout Montgomery, Chester, Delaware, and Bucks counties.

Frederick takes great pride in his work, but his career represents just one aspect of a very full life. Above all else, he is a devoted family man, as the father of four children—Karlie, Briana, Andrew, and Matthew—ranging in ages from 5 to 25. He's immensely proud of all of his children, one of whom is training to be a track and field athlete. In addition, his oldest daughter recently had a child of her own, meaning he's also a grandfather.

Besides his family, Frederick prioritizes another great love of his life: basketball. He has been playing the game since he was a child; some of his fondest memories from his formative years involve taking the court with his teammates at The Palestra on the Temple University campus. He continues to play in



his downtime, just for fun, mostly with his fellow entrepreneurs during lunch breaks.

In the near future, Frederick intends to follow in the footsteps of some of his locally tied basketball heroes—namely, Geno Auriemma, the Norristown-raised head coach of the University of Connecticut women's basketball team, and the late Harry "Bud" Gardler, one of the Philadelphia Catholic League's winningest coaches of all time—by sharing his love of the game with others. He will do so by pursuing two separate but related goals: first, by earning a degree in sports management; and second, by building a basketball league/clinic from the ground up so he can provide a clean, safe, and instructive environment in which local youths ages 5 to 16 can hone their skills and also learn the importance of hard work, integrity, and sportsmanship.

"The clinic would run from October to July," he says. "It's all going to be for charity; these kids wouldn't have to buy so much as a shoelace. Everyone involved will have background checks, and I have strong ties everywhere to help me get [the league] off the ground and grow it. I just need to find the right facility first."

Frederick is a man who respects his roots.

In the course of a phone interview, he rattles off a list of schools and organizations that hold a special place in his heart: Our Lady of Fatima School; Cardinal O'Hara and Monsignor Bonner, where he completed his high school education; Academy Park High School; Southeast Delco School District; Delaware County Community College, where his oldest daughter is studying Mandarin; and two other institutions of higher learn-

ing, the University of Pennsylvania and Villanova University. In addition, he supports a number of philanthropic groups devoted to helping individuals affected by autism, homelessness, and substance abuse.

"I'm all about the underdog, the guy who came from nothing, the guy who has to fight for everything he has," he says. "I also think people should stay true to where they came from. That's why I support guys like Archie," using the nickname of the locally born basketball talent Ryan Arcidiacono, who graduated from Villanova and now plays for the NBA's Chicago Bulls. "He could have gone to school anywhere, but he stayed close to home and went to 'Nova.'"

To understand Frederick, consider his favorite movies—*Top Gun*, *Rounders*, and *Grown Ups*—and what they suggest about his character. On the surface, these three films seem as though they have little in common. Look a bit deeper, and all three tell the stories of mavericks and underdogs, people who fought and overcame great odds to achieve unexpected levels of success.

Given where he came from, where he is now, and where he intends to go from here, Charles Frederick can surely relate. ■