

# Offering a breather to clients at DePaul

## Daniel Charcholla lets his personality shine in recreation programs

By **DEBBIE WALTZER**

**E**ven Daniel Charcholla's voicemail message is friendly: "Hi, you know the drill. Toodle-oo!"

As recreation director for DePaul Community Services, a position he has held for nearly 33 years, Charcholla is known for his larger-than-life personality. The folks served by DePaul are hurting—mental illness, addictions, dysfunctional family backgrounds and more—and Charcholla sees his job as giving them a break from their troubles.

And what a break they get. At the recreation center he manages, Charcholla and his staff offer clients the use of four bowling alleys, a full gym, a fitness room and a game room. The place is always hopping, whether with basketball tournaments, softball games or arts and crafts activities.



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*Daniel Charcholla*

In February, the center was decorated in red for a festive Valentine's Day dance. Music played, and pictures were taken in front of a large red heart. "People don't really come in with dates—but they hope to get one when they're here," Charcholla quips.

Scheduled outings also are a part of the fun that Charcholla and his staff organize. Clients enjoy trips to the Rochester Museum & Science Center's Cumming Nature Center to experience maple syrup season, as well as visits to the Strasenburgh Planetarium and local movie theaters.

"You name it, we do it," says Charchol-

la, a native of Bergen who holds a bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation from SUNY College at Brockport. "The emphasis is on team experiences so that our folks feel less isolated and alone."

Marcia Dlutek, vice president for communications and development at DePaul, has worked with Charcholla for 17 years. She describes him as a natural in working with people who have challenges related to mental illness.

"Dan has devoted his career to interacting with clients through the development of therapeutic relationships," Dlutek says. "A master of inclusion, he never fails to attract significant participation in whatever he plans. Everyone seeks to join in. When you observe anything he's organized, from a basketball game to a themed social, there is a palpable energy, joy, satisfaction and a sense of achievement."

Charcholla, who also heads the DePaul Employee Recreation Services Association committee, cannot imagine doing anything else with his life.

"I love my job," he says. "Something different happens every day. I'm always moving. These are pretty fractured souls, so we try to make their lives as pleasant as possible."

Earlier in his career, Charcholla managed a group home for emotionally disturbed teens.

"I've always been interested in therapeutic recreation," he says. "Recreation provides our clients with something besides nothing. Their medications keep them stable, but the meds can lower their motivation levels. As a result, we do whatever we can to keep them moving."

The work is extremely satisfying, he adds.

"Hopefully, we're helping to repair their damaged minds and give them a break from their troubles. We get a lot of smiles out of them—and that makes all of us happy."

*Debbie Waltzer is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*

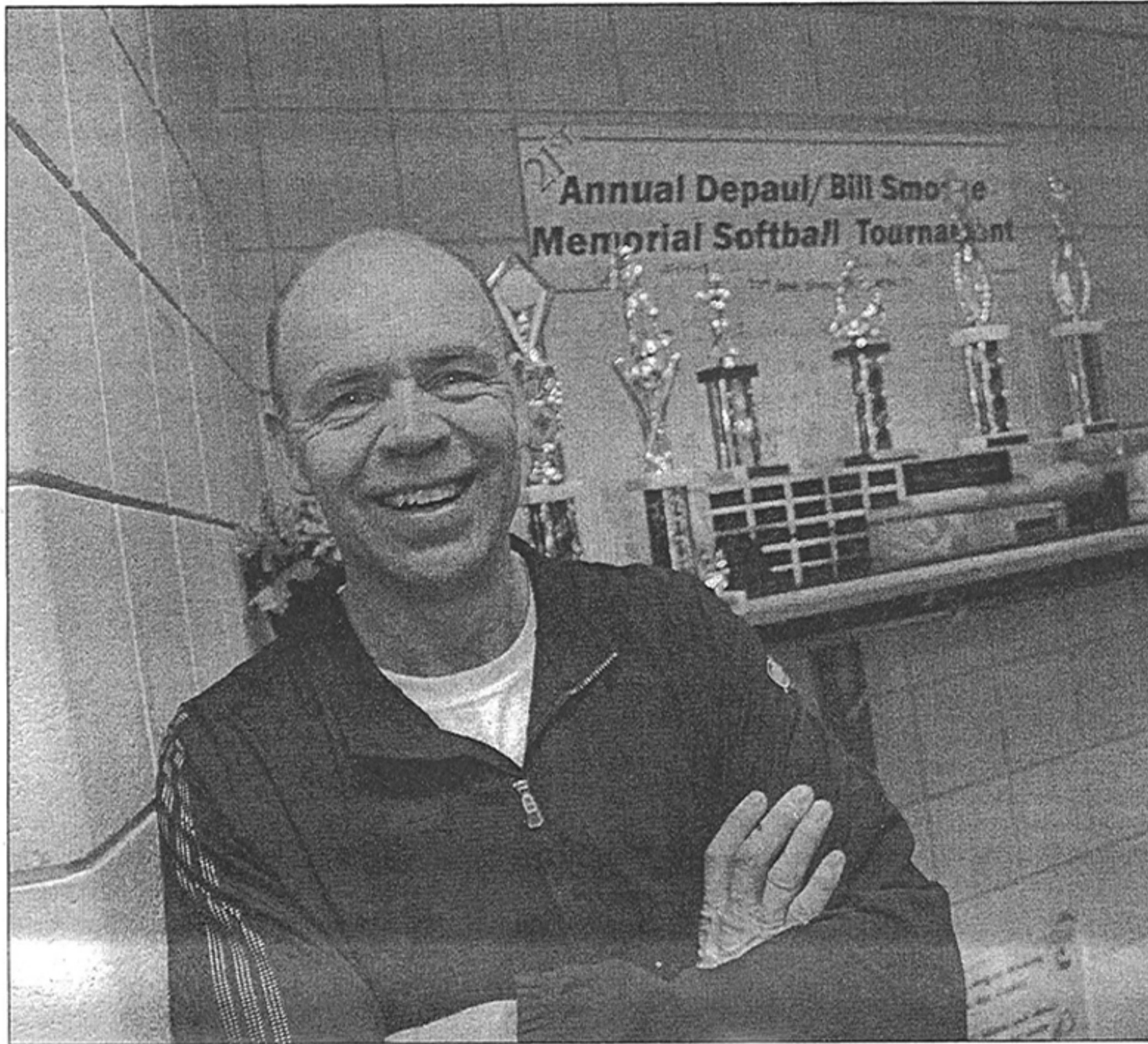


Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

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