



Rich Funke, co-anchorman of Channel 10's 'Live at Five' news program and sportscaster for the 6 and 11 p.m. broadcasts, has worked at WHEC in Rochester for 17 years.

Sportscaster relishes giving back to others

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — As much as Rich Funke strives to be a regular guy, he knows that he'll never blend into a crowd as long as he lives in Rochester.

"I'll go to a Red Wing game and 50 people will come up to me," said Funke, currently the city's best-known sportscaster. "But it beats the alternative: that nobody knows you."

And if Funke is occasionally overwhelmed by the attention he receives when venturing out into the public, it's not the result of a publicity campaign to become an icon of the airwaves.

The truth is, Funke is only receiving the same amount of affection he's already given out. He simply enjoys people, as evidenced by the numerous guest appearances he makes at various charity functions each year.

"I try to always speak to the people; to take the time. That's just being a good person," he shrugged.

For the last several years, Funke has sported one of the most visible faces in Rochester. Though only 43 years old, he's already in his 18th year as sports director at WHEC TV-10.

Yet Funke never gets so wrapped in the glamour of his current profession that he ever forgets his humble roots: his first job consisted of hawking fruits and vegetables from his father's roadside stand in East Pembroke, N.Y.

"I grew up in a small town on a farm. I never thought I'd be in this position," said Funke.

A 1971 graduate of Adelphi University on Long Island, Funke began his local broadcasting career as a news reporter with two AM stations, WHAM and WAXC. He was the first

media person on the scene when the Attica prison riots broke out in 1971.

Funke's career at Channel 10 began in 1974 and has gone uninterrupted except for a one-year stint at WTBJ-TV in Miami, Fla. Citing a preference to raise his family in Rochester, he returned to Channel 10 from Miami in 1981.

Never did family matters become more important for Funke and his wife of 23 years, Pat, than a recent experience involving their son, Rich.

In late 1989 Rich was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, a cancer of the lymph nodes. For one full year, he underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

During that time, the elder Funke began to see life in a new way.

"It was a tough time, no question about it," said Funke. "Cancer is a terrible thing. You do a lot more praying when things get closer to you."

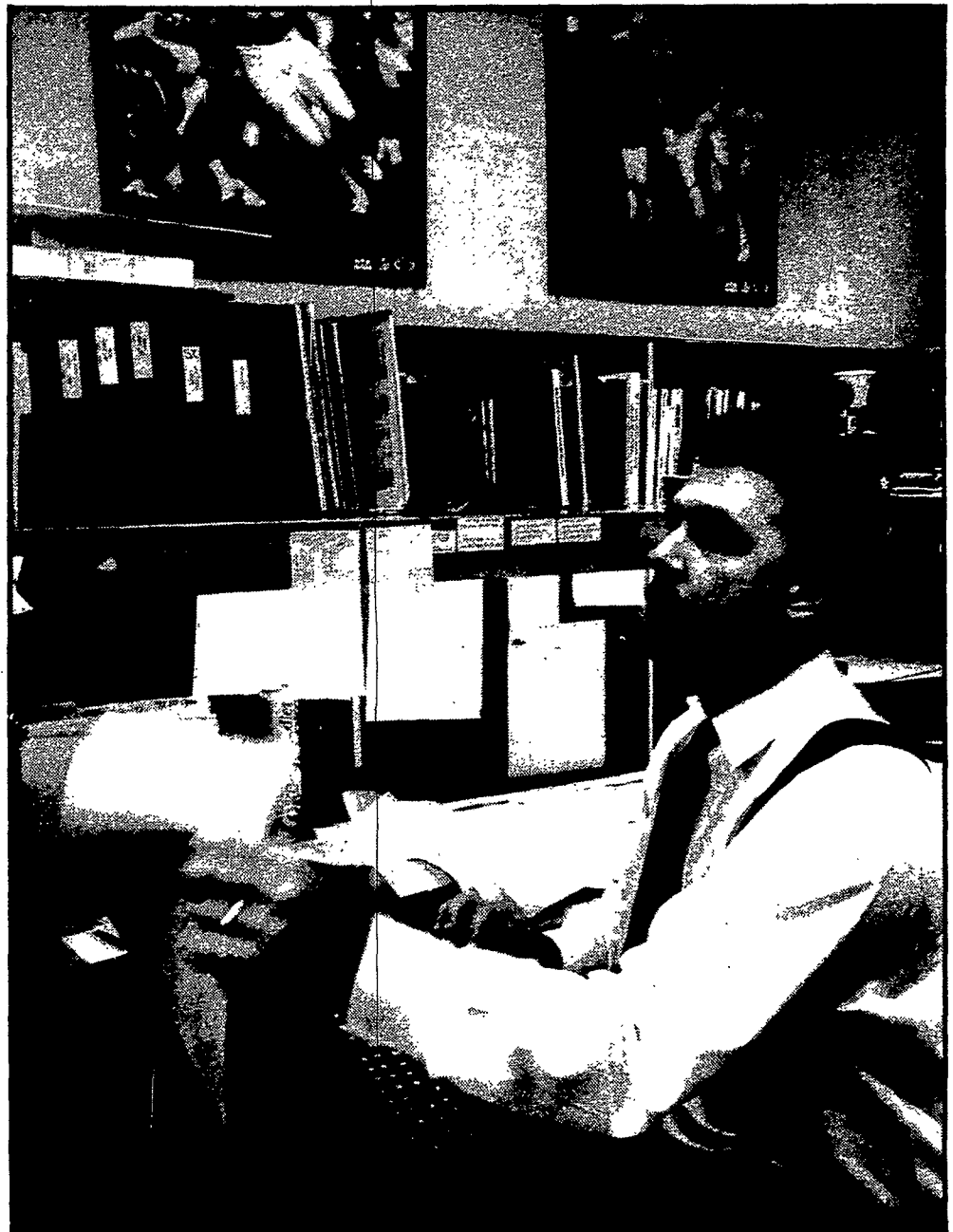
"I've always had a strong faith, but it became a lot clearer to me during this experience what it was all about."

Rich's cancer has since gone into remission. "Rich became healthy, and I thought God was the reason why," his father stated.

The experience with Rich, now 22, was the driving force behind Funke's decision to become Catholic last year.

"When my son was sick, the priests from St. Thomas the Apostle Church were very good," said Funke, an Irondequoit resident. "I was Protestant and had gone to Mass with my wife because she was Catholic. So I was on the sidelines but not in the game. I thought it was about time to get in the game."

The sobering turn of events has led nicely into Funke's appointment in March, 1991, as Channel 10's news co-



As he puts the finishing touches on some copy, Funke checks to see how much time he has left until he goes on the air with his sports report during the 6 p.m. broadcast.

anchor on its "Live at Five" 5 p.m. weekday news show. It's the first time that Funke has ever performed duties at WHEC not related to sports.

"As I get older, the issues change for me. When you have a son who is sick, the politics of health care become important," he observed. "As your kids go to college, you become interested in the issue of college tuition rates." (Rich attends the State University of New York College at Brockport; and 17-year-old Melissa is a freshman at St. Bonaventure University.)

"Covering millionaire athletes, who think their problems are the most serious ones on Earth, becomes a little old after a while," Funke added.

Yet Funke still claims to possess his basic love for sports, and, in addition to Live at Five, he plans on continuing his more familiar role — delivering Channel 10's sports during the 6 and 11 p.m. weekday newscasts.

He'll also continue to make his customary appearances at various scholastic and professional sporting events throughout the year. It's doubtful, though, that Funke will ever have another experience quite like the one that occurred last January in St. Paul, Minn.

"It was Super Bowl Sunday and I

wanted to go to Mass," he recalled. "There's a very famous cathedral there (St. Paul's Cathedral) and it's huge; it probably seats 3,500 people. When it came time for the sign of peace, this couple turned around to shake hands — and, lo and behold, they turned out to be parishioners from St. Thomas the Apostle who had gotten tickets to the game."

"And I was really thankful to see them," Funke quipped. "I had walked to church and it was freezing, and they gave me a ride back to the hotel."

Golf tourney to benefit Catholic Family Center

PENFIELD — The Pat Gaffney Golf Tournament will take place Monday, Sept. 14, at Penfield Country Club, 1784 Jackson Road.

Formerly known as the Catholic Family Center Tournament, this benefit was renamed for Pat Gaffney, who died suddenly in 1990. Mr. Gaffney was past president of the Board of Catholic Charities.

The entry fee of \$100 includes lunch, greens fees, cocktail party and awards. Call 716/546-7220 for details.



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