

RECOGNITION OF CARMEN
SCIALABBA

HON. JOHN P. MURTHA

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 13, 2000

Mr. MURTHA. Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with my colleagues the attached newspaper article describing an achievement award recently bestowed upon a long-time member of my staff, Carmen Scialabba, by his high school alma mater. It is a fitting tribute to an extraordinary individual and I hope you will take the time to read it.

Many of you recognize or have gotten to know Carmen over the 24 years he has worked with me. He is a patient and tireless attendee of appropriations hearings and mark-ups and has been absolutely indispensable in his role as Associate Staff, handling all manner of appropriations-related issues as well as a wide array of constituent services. He has been an indispensable aide, conceiving numerous economic development projects with me and overseeing them to their fruition, to the benefit of countless workers and families back home in Pennsylvania.

Many of you probably do now know, however, the heroic story of how Carmen Scialabba has overcome the harshest adversities, beginning in his early childhood when the untimely death of his mother landed him and his brothers in an orphanage while his father went off to war.

You may not know that he had enlisted in the Marine Corps and become a champion boxer before he was tragically stricken with polio and collapsed before a fight at the height of his career.

You may not know how he overcame his debilitating illness to raise four daughters as a single parent after their young mother succumbed to leukemia; how he fought against appalling prevailing attitudes toward the disabled to be able to attend college, ultimately earning a masters degree; how he made a difference to hundreds of young students as a high school history teacher; how he then served his community as a local magistrate before he joined me in coming to Washington to help the people of Pennsylvania in yet another capacity.

He has been fighting for years to eradicate institutional discrimination against the disabled. Whether it involves helping a single long-suffering Veteran to obtain needed rehabilitation services and regain self-sufficiency or developing partnerships with employers and vocational rehabilitation facilities to help employ people with special needs, he has been a tireless advocate for "leveling the playing field" for the economic, as well as the physically, disadvantaged.

His passionate advocacy for 'doing the right thing' and his blunt, no-nonsense demeanor have earned him a somewhat fearsome reputation befitting a champion prizefighter. They've coined an expression in Washington. It is known as being "Carmenized," and they say you certainly know when it has happened to you. Yet to those who know him best he is a gentle soul with an enormous heart of gold.

I realize such achievements and praise are usually only associated with high-profile public

servants. Carmen has never been high-profile. A true product of the blue-collar hardscrabble steel and coal regions of Pennsylvania from which he hails, he has set about his extraordinary life with near-Biblical humility. He has never once lost sight of his guiding belief that his purpose in life is to serve others and that, although life is certainly not always fair, everyone deserves fair treatment by their government as well as their fellow man.

Again, I am glad to be able to share the attached article with my colleagues and submit it for inclusion in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so that history will remember the life and work of this consummate public servant as staff to the United States Congress.

[From the Eagle, June 9, 2000]

POLIO CAN'T KEEP '53 GRAD DOWN—CARMEN
SCIALABBA WINS PRESTIGIOUS BHS AWARD

(By Shari Kitzmiller)

BUTLER TWP—Base your life on what you can do for other people, not what they can do for you.

That's the doctrine that has gotten Butler alumnus Carmen Scialabba where he is today.

It's also the attitude that has earned him a prestigious award from his high school alma mater.

Scialabba was named the 21st recipient of the Butler School District Distinguished Graduate Award during commencement ceremonies Wednesday night.

He is a 1953 graduate of the school.

High school Principal Dale Lumley said recipients are not invited to attend commencement because it usually is too hard for those who no longer live in the Butler area to guarantee they can make it.

Winners are notified after the announcement is made public.

A committee of students picked Scialabba from more than 50 nominees.

Scialabba lives in Silver Spring, Md., with his second wife.

Scialabba's first wife, Janice Ann Collins, died in 1979. She also was a Butler graduate.

Receiving the award is an honor, he said, because a teacher he admired—Margaret Puff—also won the award in 1986.

Puff was a geography teacher in the district who sparked Scialabba's interest in the subject, he said.

"Because of her, I got my master's in geography," he said.

Since that time, Scialabba has led a busy life.

A current associate staff member for the U.S. House of Representatives and a top aide to U.S. Rep. John Murtha of Johnstown, Scialabba started his career in the House in 1975.

Prior to that time, he served as a district magistrate in Johnstown. He also was a junior high history teacher in the Johnstown public school system.

A former Marine, Scialabba once thought he was destined for a professional boxing career.

In 1956 he represented the U.S. Marine Corps in the Southwest Olympic Trial. In 1959, he gained the ALL U.S. Marine Corps Lightweight Boxing Champion title and represented the Corps in the Pan American trials.

He began his professional boxing career when he left the Marines and was named Ring Magazine's Prospect of the Month in August 1960.

His career was cut short just a year later, however, when he was diagnosed with polio.

The illness left him paralyzed from the waist down.

But he didn't let his paralysis keep him from achieving his goals. Told he would never walk again, he fought against medical odds and learned to walk with leg braces.

That was just the start of his fight for the rights of the disabled.

Scialabba has taken his personal experience and used it to help others in similar situations.

He is working to get rewarding jobs for Americans who currently are receiving disability compensation because they have been unable to get employment.

"I want to form a non-profit group to talk to industry people to convince them it's wise to hire people with disabilities," Scialabba said, "I have a few members already in place. We're getting there, but we're not quite there yet."

He also has worked with engineers at Penn State University to create what he affectionately calls the "Lazy Carmen."

The invention, which he uses in this office at work, allows him to turn 360 degrees in his wheelchair without having to do it manually.

"It takes a lot of effort to turn this thing around," Scialabba said of his wheelchair. "Lazy Carmen" saves a lot of energy and a lot of time."

More information on the invention can be found on Penn State's Web site at www.psu.edu.

Scialabba said the invention is not yet ready to market, but he is looking for a manufacturer for the product.

Aside from his desire to help the disabled, Scialabba has some advice for the graduating class at Butler High School.

"This may sound kind of corny, but work awful hard," he said.

He also encourages the graduates to help those who can't help themselves because it builds good character.

"I've tried to frame my life around what I can do for other people, not what they can do for me," Scialabba said.

Also stay close to your family, he said, no matter where your life takes you.

Scialabba, who said his brother Nick helped him get into college, is still an important part of his life.

Nick and another brother, Anthony, still live in Butler.

CARMEN SCIALABBA

WHAT: 2000 Butler School District Distinguished Graduate Award recipient.

EDUCATION: 1953 Butler High School graduate; 1966 graduate of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown; 1965 history department scholar; master's degree in the arts from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

ORGANIZATIONS: Formed the Johnstown Boxing Club.

EXTRA DUTIES: Serves on the Board of Directors for the Governor's Council for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation; Operations and Planning Board member; New Partnerships Task Force member for the Hiram G. Andrews Center in Johnstown; Penn State University Review Board of the Institute for Non-Lethal Defense Technology; the City Planning Commission of Johnstown; and the Governor's Council for the Physically Handicapped.

AWARDS AND HONORS: 1974 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Handicapped Person of the Year; 1975 inductee to the Butler Area Sports Hall of Fame; National Guard Ben Franklin Award for dedicated service to Pennsylvania; National Guard Patrick Henry Award for distinguished patriotic service.