

TGA Award: Cliff Ensley

A Leisurely Trajectory

In conversation, Cliff Ensley's casual delivery and deeply authoritative voice could challenge Morgan Freeman for narration of the "March of the Penguins" sequel. It's hard to imagine there was a time this year's TGA Award winner could barely speak, communicating with utterances only his mother could understand. It's a humble beginning for a remarkable success story.

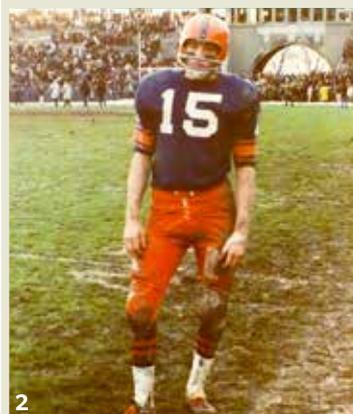
"As a young child, I was challenged with learning disabilities. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, you didn't have learning disabilities, you were just considered slow, or dumb," recalls Ensley, who was born in 1947, the third of four children.

Ensley says when he'd look at words he'd read them backwards; numbers would get reversed and he'd write them down wrong, which sounds like a form of dyslexia although he never applies that label to himself or his daughter, who was similarly afflicted. "For many years as a kid I wouldn't say anything at the table – I'd point. I had my own language only my mom would understand. I think somewhere, the brainwaves aren't totally connected. When I turned 10 or 12, the brain started connecting, so things got better. I couldn't finish an exam. My daughter went through the same thing, and she got these special teachers. I told them, 'In the next few years things will come together, and sure enough, they did for her, too.'"

Ensley's father, Grover, was born on a wheat farm in Colfax, WA. "He rode a horse to school, with his brother behind him, to a one-room schoolhouse in the middle of farmland," Ensley recounts. "There was something in him that drove him to an education, which he instilled in me, and hopefully in Scott [Ensley's son]. He got into the University of Washington – he couldn't afford it but had about three jobs. He got a fellowship to the University of Denver, where he got his master's in public administration, and that's where he met my mom. He got another fellowship to get his



1. Cliff Ensley receiving the TGA Award from Jack Holodnicki. 2. After his last home game at Syracuse, 1968, in which he had an 80-yard punt return for a touchdown. 3. Cliff's son Scott, with (left to right) daughter Sahara, wife Heather and son Jackson.



4. Cliff's daughter Jennifer, holding daughter Madeline, with husband Ryan holding son Jameson. 5. Cliff with his wife Sue.

PhD at NYU, so he and mom went to New York and got married."

Ensley's father would eventually become executive director of the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress, 1949-1957, serving under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. His papers are preserved at the Truman

Library. "He ended his career in the late 1970s, as first international president of the mutual savings banks," states Ensley.

Ensley grew up in Fairfax, VA, until his family moved to New York when he was 11. "I was the only southern kid so they made fun of me. I kind of slurred

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Speech was difficult for the young Cliff Ensley, but he had no problem communicating on the athletic field, where he found his voice. He was the last 3-sport letter athlete at Syracuse, and won Athlete of the Year at the university in 1969.

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my words and talked funny – they thought I had a southern accent – but I was a good athlete in grade school, so they all liked me.”

Ensley loved athletics, which gave him freedom of expression. “I didn’t have to talk. I didn’t have to socialize. You got out there, and it was your actions, physically, that counted.” He played pickup games in Virginia, before progressing to organized athletics in New York. “I was able to learn and excel in sports. It gave me the confidence to struggle on and face the learning challenges in the other areas of my life.” He recalls high school: “I went from sitting on the bench as a freshman to captain of the football, wrestling and lacrosse teams and voted athlete of the year in 1965.”

When asked what he wanted to be, growing up, Ensley doesn’t have a ready answer. “I didn’t want to do what my dad did, I didn’t understand what he did. And I didn’t want to be a pro athlete. I was too busy dealing with the current situation – I didn’t have time to think about the future. I was surviving in the present.” With no scholarship prospects and no career goals to guide him, Ensley’s choice of college was wide open.

“Coaches and friends thought a small school where I might be able to play a sport would be best for me. Academics wasn’t a factor,” he recounted in his awards speech. Ensley chose Syracuse University, which he described as a powerhouse with a national football championship in the recent past, a good wrestling program and solid lacrosse team. “It wasn’t that big a school – 8,000 undergraduates at the time – but they played well over their heads against schools with 40,000 students. It was like high school all over again, except at a higher level.”

Ensley was a walk-on athlete, as

opposed to someone actively recruited or on an athletic scholarship, but during spring football practice he was offered a three-year scholarship. “I learned a lot in my freshman year about football, wrestling, engineering and more importantly myself. I was a three-year starter in both football and lacrosse, and ended up as an honorable mention All-American in football, and captain and MVP of the lacrosse team.”

Ensley’s athletic career at Syracuse was incredible. He’s the last Syracuse athlete to letter in three sports – football, wrestling and lacrosse – and was the university’s athlete of the year in 1969. But it was a different academic story, as Ensley struggled toward an engineering degree. “I went with sciences because it wasn’t much reading, it was problem solving,” he reasoned, but despite going with his academic strengths he ended his first semester with three Cs and an F. But Ensley kept at it, and ended his academic career at Syracuse with four As and his name on the dean’s list, while also helping coach the freshman football squad.

Ensley was in a five-year program at Syracuse, but despite being a standout athlete never considered a professional athletic career. “When I got to the end of my fourth year I was in ROTC, and I considered West Point, but if I went into the military going out of school I don’t think I would have gone back. If I did pro football I’d get to do a year, and then have to go into the military,” he explains, saying a year of pro ball wouldn’t be much of a career.

“One of my professors said, ‘Hey Cliff, if you do another year you’d have an MBA. That was 50% more pay, and fit nicely with my engineering degree, so I went ahead and got the education. Mentally, that’s what I was saying. But emotionally, I missed the athletics. I never got to try it because I would’ve ended up in the military and ended my

education, and the best decision was to get that education. The Army finally called me in – I went in 1972 – it was supposed to be for two years, but they said I was going to be in for six months and they sent us home in two months.”

By the time he was released from the Army it was September, and too late to try out for a pro football team so Ensley did the next best thing, playing semi-pro ball for the Long Island Chiefs. “We made it into the championship game and lost, but we were a decent team. My son was born that October. I remember my wife calling while I was out on the field; I changed clothes, picked her up at home and then came Scott.”

Ensley never had a mapped-out career path. “I never really gave it a thought, I was kind of busy having a good time doing what I was doing at the time,” he remembers. “I do know when I came out with my MBA I had three or four interviews. I went with retailing because it paid more than anything else.”

“I knew I wanted to go after a position where in a couple of years there’d be something on the line, like in athletics, to see if I was any good or not. I wanted to be graded. In retailing, your numbers are out there for anyone to see. They’re either increasing or decreasing. It had the visibility of athletics – you’d be rewarded if you did well, and on the bench if you didn’t.”

Ensley’s first post-Syracuse job was with A&S Department Stores in Brooklyn, NY, part of Federated Department Stores. “I became a luggage buyer in 1974, and left A&S in 1976 to become the sales manager for Henry Rosenfeld luggage, the predecessor of Bandanco, which is now part of Randa. I learned a lot about retail at A&S, and about sales at Rosenfeld. By 1978 I felt ready to start my own luggage company. I had \$2,500, no expectations, and

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CLIFF ENSLEY

Ensley's success in business, and his love for Syracuse, led him to contribute toward an indoor practice field for Syracuse athletics. This tribute wall and bust greet visitors to what is officially named the Clifford J. Ensley Athletic Center.



I wasn't afraid to fail."

Ensley was unafraid, because of his experiences in childhood. "Looking back, the learning disability was really a great advantage. What they teach you to do, if you're an average kid, is to go from Point A to Point B. For me, getting to Point B was like going through the jungle. It took twice as long. Later in life, the first time the average person goes up against something that's not so easy, they give up. They're afraid and they give up. Me, if I'm trying to get from Point A to Point B I'm lost. I was always lost. But I know it's out there and I'll find it, even if I have to take a different path to get there. That's why I was in athletics. It was always that equalizer: Let's be judged by what we do and not how we get there."

Ensley established Leisure Luggage, and began his career as a manufacturer. "I learned to struggle those first 10 years, but kept moving forward. The second 10 years were better – not quite where I wanted Leisure to be, but I knew we were still in the game. The next 10 years were growth years, and the last 10 years have been far beyond my wildest expectations, like those I experienced at Syracuse, especially those four As my last semester. It took longer, but I became a better businessman than I was an athlete."

The most difficult part of starting Leisure was money. "I had no money. The financing was the weakness. After a year I was going through a divorce, but I knew the managers and DMMs [divisional merchandise managers], and I had a reputation for knowing what to do with different buyers and their bosses. I had [financial] backing until he backed out the first year. I got a Korean to give me a million dollars, I paid it back over three or four years. It was creative financing, but because I'd paid back the first people, other people would give me money. Banks wouldn't

lend to me, I had no collateral. But factories would ship on terms, and I'd pay them back. Now we have unlimited credit, I do business overseas on a handshake."

Leisure's defining moment came in the mid-1980s. "We'd just gotten a huge shipment of defective products. It ended up in arbitration, but I made good on the stores, took on all the loss, and the stores got their merchandise. I had to file Chapter 11, but the banks supported me during the Chapter 11 and I came out of Leisure Luggage in 1987 with Leisure Merchandising Corp. We came out swinging, with a new company, and just kept on going. The last 15 years have been good, but the last seven or eight have been great."

Syracuse athletics taught Ensley the importance of giving back to younger players, and that shaped him in business as well. Leisure and Ensley had reached the point where he thought they had something to contribute. In 2009, Ensley, Jack Holodnicki of Olivet and Scott Kosmin from 24-7 International joined TGA's Board of Directors, which helped influence future direction for TGA and The International Travel Goods Show, including establishment of early-booking discounts and drastically reduced exhibitor rates that have helped grow The Show from an 80,000-square-foot trade event to a 160,000+-square-foot enterprise with more than 300 exhibitors. Ensley is the immediate past chair of TGA's Board, preceding current chairman Scott Kosmin.

Leisure's economic success has also enabled Ensley to give back to his alma mater, which so obviously shaped his future trajectory. Ten years ago Ensley established an endowment, Orange Forever. "Any athlete who ever played at Syracuse, the family receives an orange blanket when the athlete dies. It's anonymous, but comes with a card saying it's from their teammates. It'll go

on forever. Ten years from now nobody will know who created it, and that's fine with me. It brings a smile to families at a tough time in their lives."

Ensley has also been able to contribute toward Syracuse's future athletic success, with a multi-million dollar gift to the university that, coupled with previous gifts from other school benefactors, enabled construction of the Clifford J. Ensley Athletic Center, an 87,000-square-foot indoor practice facility with a full 120-yard playing area and a 65-foot roof tall enough to enable kicking and passing activity. "Before they had a 60-yard scrimmage field house. When I was in college the first time we played on grass it was on a spring trip," he remembers. "This way they start the season in shape. Syracuse is probably the best lacrosse program in the country – they haven't won a championship in six years, but were champs in eleven of the past 34 years. They had a string where they went to the final four 22 years in a row, which is unheard of. This year we're really counting on them to bring home a championship."

Early this year, Leisure announced the hiring of longtime industry vet David Bieber, who led DELSEY for 15 years and was himself recipient of the TGA Award in 2015. "We picked up the wildcard draft of the year," quips Ensley. "I'd met David when we were both on TGA's Board of Directors. He always had a talent for making nice product and running successful companies. I could see some opportunities ahead for Leisure, but they'd need a lot of work and product development, and I'm not ready for that at 70 years old. This gives me an opportunity to back away and let the business grow."

Ensley looks forward to spending more time with family, and being close to his alma mater. He's just finished a home in Syracuse, on the lake. "I'm looking forward to outings with guys I coached and played with. Those friendships you made back there, 40 or 50 years ago, you learn to trust them. You may not see the guy for 20 or 30 years, but it's like you were on the field yesterday," he relates, musing on athletics' impact on his own life and career. "I was happy not when Leisure was doing well, but when the customers did well. When we can both do well it's even better, that's the way it's kind of been." ■

The Product Innovation Awards: Celebrating Innovation – the Industry’s Lifeblood

Without innovation, and the new products it inspires, The Show would be a boring affair. Thankfully, each year’s Show brings a crop of interesting new items, from longtime industry brands and startup companies alike. In the words of David Lomas, chairman of the Product Innovation Awards

Committee, “Without product innovation, without development, without people pushing forward, the industry will stagnate.”

More than 300 exhibitors at this year’s Show made for a particularly full field of contenders in the Product Innovation competition. The New Products Pavilion – from which winners are selected – was loaded with

prospective winners, but the judges were able to emerge with a trio of clear winners. Says Lomas, “Innovation is the lifeblood of the industry, and that’s what we look for.”

Interestingly, all three of this year’s winners were first-time exhibitors at The Show, which continues to draw newcomers from all over the world to the biggest showcase in travel goods.

First Place:

JetKids BedBox

JetKids took top honors with the BedBox, a 3-in-1 ride-on rolling suitcase that doubles as an in-flight seat bottom extension, creating a bed space for infants and toddlers. It’s a clever design, able to accommodate various seat heights, and includes space for diapers, changing supplies, food and other baby necessities.



(L to R) Frederik Løken, Jørn Andre Gustu, inventor Christina Holmgren, Alice Parker and Flavie Hocquet of JetKids receive the first-place trophy from Product Innovation Awards Committee Chair David Lomas.



Second Place:

Smoots Comfort Conscious Footwear

Ken Kammal was inspired to launch Smoots after shuffling through airport security in his stocking feet, wishing for a better solution. His Comfort Conscious Footwear mates a flexibly comfy recycled rubber sole with bamboo/cotton blend socklike uppers, which are naturally anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and hypoallergenic.



(L to R) Ian Moore and inventor Ken Kammal accept the second-place trophy from David Lomas.



Third Place:

XTEND Expandable Wheeled Carry-on

XTEND was a last-minute addition to The Show, and it paid off as it took third place honors with its interesting take on a carry-on roller. The case expands 35%, and its oversize wheels let it roll with almost eerie smoothness, even over carpet. A dedicated laptop pocket, USB-A and USB-C charging ports all connect to the 20,000 mAh battery, which also powers the case’s fingerprint lock. It’s a lot of thoughtful tech in a cabin-size footprint.



(L to R) XTEND founders Jérôme Tricault and Louis Devalay, with David Lomas and the third-place award.



PHOTOS: (AWARDS CEREMONY) KERRY PITTENGER; (PRODUCT IMAGES) COURTESY OF EXHIBITORS

Community Service Award:

Pacsafe Turtle Fund

This year's TGA Community Service Award went to Pacsafe, for its dedication to helping preserve and safeguard marine turtles the world over, with its own Turtle Fund.

The Turtle Fund was conceived and launched in 2014. It's essentially a grant program, by which Pacsafe awards funds to various marine turtle preservation programs around the world. "Rather than give money to an organization where we know nothing of where it goes, we wanted to set up a fund where we could protect turtles and really get into the grass roots. We've given nine grants, totaling \$130,000," said Pacsafe co-founder Magnus McGlashan.

Sea turtles are a fitting benefactor for Pacsafe's efforts – the company's logo is an iconic depiction of a stylized padlock as a marine turtle, and in the words of McGlashan, "the turtle symbolizes independence and travel, all over the world."

Recipients of Pacsafe Turtle Fund grants include such far-flung organizations as:

- Corcovado, Costa Rica
- Fauna & Flora International, Nicaragua
- Latin American Sea Turtles (LAST), Costa Rica
- Pro Fauna, Baja, Mexico
- Sea Turtle Conservancy, Florida and the greater Caribbean
- Te Mana o Te Moana, French Polynesia
- The Olive Ridley Project, Maldives

Turtle Fund grants have helped pay for patrols in turtle nesting grounds to ward off poachers; turtle nurseries to help increase hatchling survival (marine turtle mortality is so high, figures as low as 1 in 100 or 1 in 1,000 are cited for survival to



Pacsafe's Tim Corliss and Magnus McGlashan accepted the 2017 Community Service Award presented by Jack Holodnicki of Olivet International.

sexual maturity and adulthood); catch-and-release programs for research and medical care, including tagging, radio tracking, fishhook and fishnet entanglement removal; and education programs. Funding has also helped with ocean cleanup efforts, which is incredibly important for turtles – plastic bags make up a huge percentage of the man-made debris that washes out to sea, and unfortunately they're often ingested by turtles which mistake them for jellyfish, one of their staple foods.

The company has also helped raise awareness with its own website, including interactive turtle tracking, links to turtle information resources, and naming contests for sponsored turtles (names have included Turpac and Rob, the latter named for a Pacsafe company founder).

It's a terrific program, and rather fitting given the turtle's role as company totem and talisman. 

Buzz Award:

Audience Favorite

The Buzz Award is The Show's version of a people's choice award, voted on by attending retailers and media, with a ballot populated by items from the New Products Pavilion.

This year's attendees were wowed by the little sunglasses that could: **Popticals**. These innovative fold-up sunglasses carry the motto, "Pack small. Live big." Described as the world's first pop-out sunglasses, the unique design allows the sunglass frame to pull apart at the nosepiece, with one lens sliding forward to overlap the other, overlapping in the fashion of sliding closet doors. And they're far more than a gimmick, with five styles, Italian manufacturing and lenses by Carl Zeiss Vision. 



Attending retailers and media voted Popticals their favorite item. (L to R) Popticals' Preston Porter, Jonathan Martinez, Kevin Miquelon and Sam Bryant.

Best Booth Awards:

Building a Better Show, One Booth at a Time

The Best Booth Contest has become an annual Show tradition. Winners are voted on by attending retailers and media, and the competition is restricted to small-footprint booths only, in order to reward inventiveness instead of blow-the-budget spending. This is about recognizing those exhibitors who are raising the stakes with showmanship, and hopefully inspiring others to do the same.

Winners are declared in three categories:

- 100 square feet
- 200-300 square feet
- 400-600 square feet

100 Square Feet:

Light Flight

Light Flight's simple booth – with a back wall in this year's hot color, sea green – used block letters on rectangular surrounds to evoke an old-style electromechanical airport flight information board. Susan Sontag's "I haven't been everywhere, but it's on my list" set the tone on one wall, with Light Flight's "It's on our list" scrawled beneath. It's a compact presentation that unmistakably evokes the romance of air travel, and shows off goods that help you take flight.

200-300 Square Feet:

JetKids

With oval-shape "windows" and airline seating with which to demonstrate its BedBox® that works in concert with the seat to create an in-flight infant bed, the JetKids booth had the unmistakable feel of an airport or airliner – precisely the environment its BedBox was made for.

The Norwegians at JetKids seem to have really done their homework, not only taking top honors in the Product Innovation Awards, but taking a Best Booth trophy as well, with a booth possessing the feel of a high-end airport terminal, with the cleanness of Scandinavian design sensibility.

400-600 Square Feet:

Herschel Supply Company

Herschel Supply Company adopted a clean style that made the most of contrast, with stark white walls and shelving coupled with a dark wood floor to set off the soft, rounded silhouettes of its bags and newly launched 4-wheelers. This booth won because it was a triumph of clean execution, with room to breathe and presentation that put its products foremost. 



The Light Flight team of Todd Kramer, Doris Hong, Helder Gomes, Nina Xiao, Roy Wang, Jacen Lee and Arik Zheng come together to celebrate their Best Booth win.



Bringing home one more award from an already outstanding show: Frederik Løken and Jørn Andre Gustu accept the Best Booth Award for JetKids.



Stylish, clean and minimalist, the Herschel booth earned a Best Booth Award for beaming Herschel staffers Simon Aaronson, Sarah Simpson and Kellen Roland.