

## When Charles Solano, a member of the Cereal City Sunrise Rotary Club in Battle Creek, Michigan, failed at his attempt to set a new 24-hour world record for chin-ups, he didn't give up!

Few people can do several hundred chin-ups in a 12-hour day. And even fewer people can do several thousand. But only one person in the world, Charles Solano, can do 5,107!

As the spring rains fell on Battle Creek, Friday, May 3, many friends and fellow Rotarians, along with wife, Jessica, and daughter, Kaia—and two official witnesses—assembled at one of Solano's five coffee shops to see Solano brake the old record of 3,751 chin-ups in eight hours, with a total of 3800, and beat the 12-hour record of 4,649, with an amazing 5,107 chin-ups.

For Solano, who served eight years in the Marine Reserves, the astonishing feat was more about reaching a goal than setting a record. "I was on a mission, I went to war with my mind and I conquered," said Solano. Since his first attempt at breaking the 24-hour chin-ups record failed, in 2021, because of a torn bicep muscle, this past December he declared he was going after the 12-hour record. "I'm really big on doing what you say you're going to do. I learned a lot from my failed attempt at the record in 2021. When you set a goal, that is very difficult to achieve, you must accept failure as part of the process."

At age 49, Charles Solano has already accomplished and experienced more than most people do in a lifetime. His life journey began in Pinconning, Michigan, where he enjoyed playing sports, although he admitted he was small in stature and not very intimidating. It was a time when Solano would establish his philosophy of dedication and perseverance. "I always had the underdog mindset. Through hard work and determination, I made the varsity basketball team as a freshman. I would eat, sleep, and breathe basketball during this time in my life. Even though I didn't have a basketball hoop at my house, I recall clearing out the snow in the drive-way so I could work on my dribbling skills."

Another early defining moment in Solano's life came while he was a struggling part-time student at Michigan State. The dean of the college of Agriculture & Natural Resources told Solano, "if you don't take a full load of classes and achieve a 3.0 GPA, we are going to have to ask you to move on from college." Solano was at a crossroads, staring at the possibility of failing at getting his college degree. Reflecting back, Solano said he didn't get caught up in the freedom of college life, partying, or losing self-control. "My issue was more about time management and prioritization between my campus jobs, my Marine Corps Reserves obligation, and studies.

After graduating, as a Packaging Engineer from MSU, Solano began working in the corporate world at a pharma company in Chicago, then at Kellogg's and later, at Post. However, after about fifteen years, he didn't feel fulfilled. "Something was

missing,” he said, “I wanted to own my own business.” So, in 2016, along with the support of his wife and life partner, Jessica, he opened his first Biggby Coffee Shop in Battle Creek. Ironically, Solano was a regular customer at the very first Biggby location in East Lansing, while going to MSU. The chain now has over 400 locations, nationwide.

Solano’s barriers of prioritization and self-doubt, from his college days, were replaced with feelings of ambition, motivation, and self-confidence. “I’m in the people business, not the coffee business,” Solano likes to say. “I’m hooked on people.” I love hiring young people and working with them to develop their people skills and self-confidence. I want to give them the foundation to develop themselves—personally and professionally—so they can learn how to be a team player. It is very rewarding.” When one of his employees was asked how she liked working at Biggby, she said, “I love it.”

Solano’s will to succeed far exceeds his world records for chin-ups. “Developing myself to become the best leader I can is important in every aspect of my life.” Today, Solano, along with fellow Rotarian Carlos Fontana, is developing future leaders through another business they founded, Rhodium Leadership Academy. Simply put, Charles Solano exemplifies the Rotary philosophy of taking action and making a difference in the community, as well as having a passion for improving lives and developing life-long friendships in the process.

Reflecting back on his four years of training to set a new 12-hour world record, Solano isn’t worried that someone will surpass his 5,107 chin-ups total. In fact, he expects it will happen. “Records are meant to be broken. The only one that I am in competition with is me! I think whoever breaks my records is pretty tough!”

When asked, what’s next? Solano replied, “When you get to the top of a mountain, then you look around to see where the next peak is and then get after it.”

Maybe the most poignant words, describing Charles Solano, came from his 10-year old daughter, Kaia. She was asked what she thought of her dad, as she watched him set two new world records for chin-ups. With little hesitation, she said, “he’s amazing.”

—Richard Schlatter