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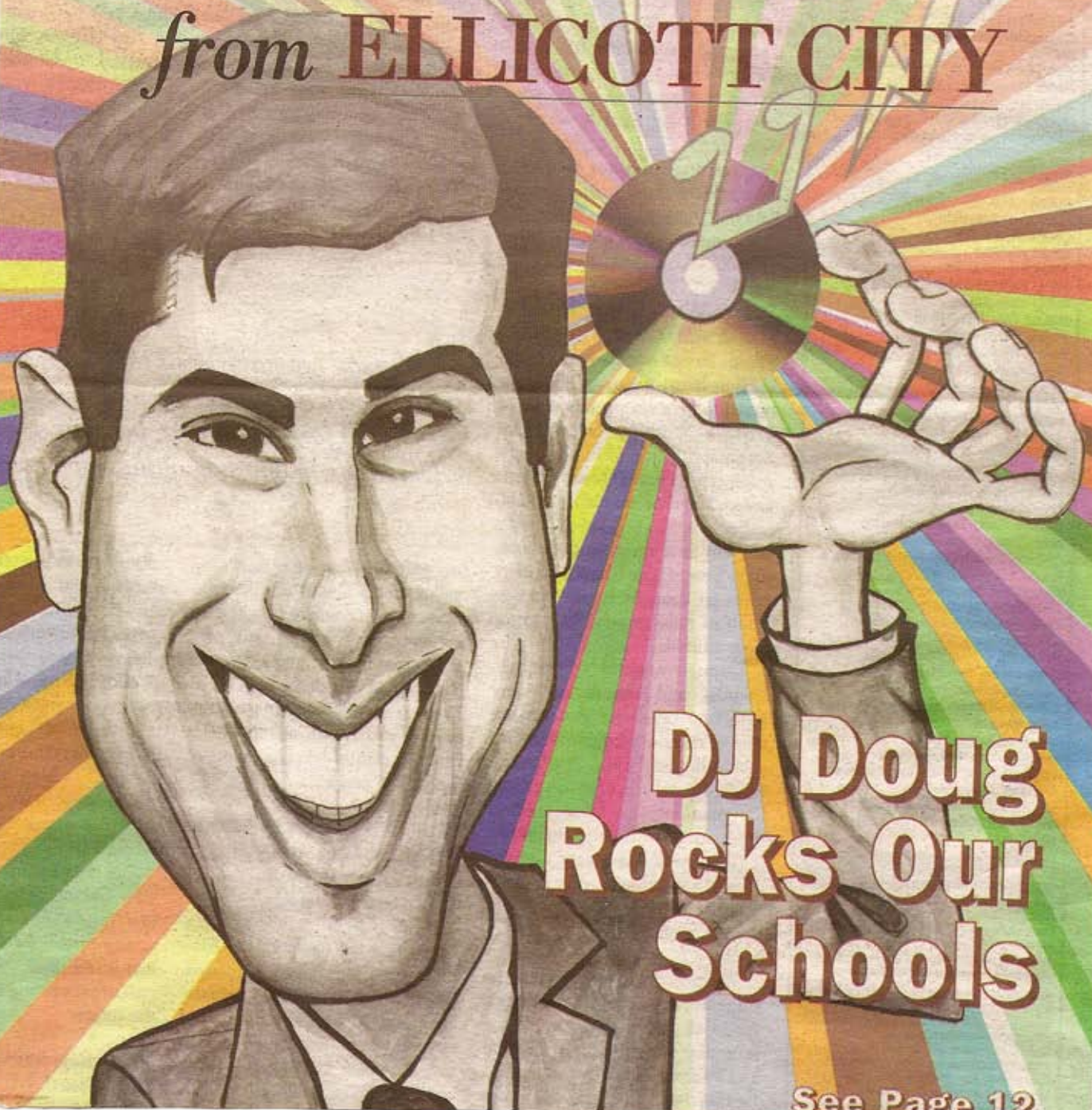
The View

VOL. 11 NO. 4

www.theviewnewspapers.com

MARCH 29, 2007

from **ELLICOTT CITY**



**DJ Doug
Rocks Our
Schools**

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ALEX HURSKY

Doug Sandler has already achieved one of his life's main ambitions. The father of two young adolescents, not only is he doing a job he loves, but his work is even considered cool by his kids.

"I know all the music. I'm hip to my daughter, and she's almost 14," he said. "I don't think that I'm an embarrassment to my kids, which has been my lifelong goal."

Most teenagers think that their parents are anything but cool, but Sandler does have a leg-up on other Howard County parents with teens at home. The Ellicott City resident makes his living spinning discs as a professional DJ. He goes by the name of DJ Doug, and entertains at parties and schools throughout the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan region.

Sandler first got into the DJ-ing business while he was a student at the University of Maryland in College Park. One

evening, he subbed for a friend at a bar popular with college kids and was hooked almost immediately. "As soon as I got that first record, it was like, 'Wow, I have control over this crowd,'" he remembered. "I loved it."

This was in the mid-1980s; funk and disco were the rage, and DJ's were still spinning vinyl records. Sandler instantly recalls the first song he ever played from behind the console. "It was a Stevie Wonder song, 'Do I Do,'" he said. "It had a good beat, a good dance beat."

It was also almost 10 minutes in length and gave Sandler a chance to sit back and watch the crowd on the dance floor. He liked what he saw and really liked

how DJ-ing made him feel.

"I liked going to parties, but I was always a little uncomfortable in a big crowd. ... I'm not a big party person, but I like running big parties. Here was my entree to all of the social scene without being a part of it," Sandler noted. But a red flag went up almost immediately. "I thought, 'Jeez, what is my mom going to think?'" he said. "I come from a long line of professionals, and this wasn't something a Jewish mother would want for her son."

He shouldn't have worried. More than twenty years later, with a solid career in the entertainment field, he knows what his mother thinks. "I think she's proud of me — I know she is. She was a single mom raising us, and she has always been there for me. My mom is my biggest fan," he added.

Although Sandler's bread-and-butter business comes from doing weddings, bar- and bat-mitzvahs and corporate parties, he gets a special satisfaction from performing at school functions. In 1992, he came up with a program he calls "DJ Doug's Road Show: Just Say Go," which is based on a game show format. School administrators can tailor the show to address the specific topics that

they want to discuss with their students.

Some of the topics Sandler addresses at school assemblies include: conflict and anger management, prevention of drug, alcohol and tobacco use and how to handle peer pressure. "It's a segmented show, about 45-60 minutes, with seven-minute segments," Sandler describes. "I can create a spin-off of any game show as long as there are rules that people can follow, like *Deal or No Deal*, *Survivor*, *Jeopardy*."

Team-building through music, dancing and fun is another component of his repertoire. Sandler has done a number of year-end 7th grade picnics for Mount View Middle School with a team-building theme. "He had the kids just eating out of the palm of his hand for an hour-and-a-half," said Nan Brown, a teacher at the school and a member of the PTA which hired DJ Doug.

Brown was amazed to see normally too-cool-for-school 12-year-olds jumping onto the stage to see which group could yell out "Sponge Bob, Square Pants" the loudest. "There were all these kids who usually don't do things together, working together, because he could get them to do

it," she recalled. "Later that day, they would laugh about what they did with him. It's a real bonding experience."

Sending kids a positive message by performing at schools is important to Sandler. "This is where I get to give back a little," he said. "If the school has a budget, great. If not, I'll still do it."

Sandler began volunteering at his children's grade school, Ilchester Elementary, during the fall of 2002, when the area was under siege during the Washington area sniper attacks. Most schools were in lock-down mode, and no matter how nice a day it was, the students were not allowed outside for recess. "He called and volunteered to come to the school," remembered former Ilchester principal Jacqueline Conarton, "He was there at every lunch shift for over a week. ... He would play, sing, do hula-hoops with them. He did everything."

Sandler quickly became a fixture at the school. "He became part of the school's culture," Conarton continued. "Whenever the kids would see him in the hall, they'd run up to him. And the teachers, too. He's a very positive force who brought such a force of light and sunshine into the school."

"I totally feel like a rock star when I walk into that school," acknowledged Sandler. "It has helped build my self-esteem. Whatever I give to those kids, I get back three-fold."

For more information on DJ Doug, visit djdoug.net or call 410-461-5500.

DJ Doug Rocks Our Schools