

Chad Pregracke

CNN Hero; Social Entrepreneur

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Topics

- Activism / Philanthropy / Civic Engagement
- Education
- Social Responsibility
- Sustainability
- Teamwork / Teambuilding
- Thought Leader

About Chad Pregracke

Chad Pregracke, the 2013 CNN Hero of the Year, is proof that one person can make a difference. At the age of 17, Chad started on a crusade to clean up America's most iconic river--The Mississippi. Since then, Chad's hard work, vision, humor, and leadership has evolved into a cultural movement that had resulted in 13 million pounds of garbage being cleaned out of America's rivers with over 126,624 volunteers and dozens of global corporations coming aboard to lend a hand.

Chad grew up, literally, with the Mississippi River as his backyard. At the age of 15, he started working on the river as a commercial shell diver, commercial fisherman and barge hand. Through those experiences, Chad witnessed firsthand the plight of the Mississippi River. Over the years, millions of pounds of often toxic debris had accumulated along the banks and islands of the river, including tens of thousands of 55-gallon barrels, tires, appliances, propane tanks, and more, in between millions of plastic bottles. At age 17, Chad began calling government agencies to tell them about the problem. With no luck or interest, he decided that if no one else would clean it up, he would.

Chad's not-for-profit organization, Living Lands & Waters, was started in 1998 and has evolved to be the only "industrial strength" river organization like it in the world with a multi-million dollar operation that includes a fleet of 5 barges, 3 towboats, a crane, an excavator, 5 work boats, 2 skid steers, and 6 work trucks.

Chad's leadership and vision have earned him over 40 awards and accolades including the 2013 CNN Hero of the Year, The Jefferson Award for Public Service, Mitchum's Hardest Working Person in America, as well as being honored at the Points of Light Tribute at the Kennedy Center, where he was given a standing ovation by all four living former U.S. Presidents. In 2007, he released a book with National Geographic about his life and mission, "From the Bottom Up: One Man's Crusade to Clean America's Rivers." He's also been featured numerous TV programs including ABC World News, CBS Sunday Morning, CNN, Discovery Channel, Fox News, National Geographic, NBC Nightly News and the Today Show.

Chad remains the driving force behind the organization and divides his time between living on a house-barge with his crew and his wife, Tammy, and their river home on the Mississippi.

Select Keynotes

- **From the Bottom Up: How A Young Man with a Small Boat Changed our Nation's Rivers**

As the founder of America's only "industrial strength" river clean-up organization and the 2013 CNN Hero of the Year, Chad Pregracke, tells a compelling and funny story about growing up on the river and how his river experiences led to his unique vision to clean up the Mississippi River and start an internationally recognized not-for-profit, Living Lands & Waters. During his talk, Chad takes the audience out on one of the world's greatest rivers – a journey filled with endless challenges and gripping adventures. His delivery is motivating, captivating, genuine and refreshingly spontaneous. From the darkness of underwater shell-diving to the brightness of open-air community clean-ups, Chad's tale embodies the importance of setting goals (one river and one piece of garbage at a time) and illustrates how determination hard-work and persistence pays off.

- **Safety Keynote: The River is a Dangerous Place.**

Cleaning up a river is a dangerous operation. With the alarming amount of workplace accidents, the vital importance for the lines of communication to be open along with the importance for engaging teams and individuals with safety procedures is crucial.



Nothing delivers the importance of a safety talk better than a personal story. Chad will share his stories of his life on the Mississippi River. Stories of being a commercial shell diver and going to battle with a dangerous river. An angry river that Chad almost drowned in several times.

Listeners will hear real examples of best practices and more intentional day-to-day safety decisions in the workplace and changing the way employees view and approach their jobs. The audience will walk away with workplace safety protocols as opposed to resisting or turning a blind-eye toward them.

Select Book Titles

- **2007:** From the Bottom Up: One Man's Crusade to Clean America's Rivers

Select Articles

- [Local river legend gets name on new tow boat](#)

KWQC, August 2016: A Quad City native who has dedicated his life to cleaning up America's waterways is being honored with a tow boat named after him. Chad Pregracke is the founder of the organization, Living Lands and Waters. Every year, staff and volunteers clean debris and garbage from rivers across the country.

Select Testimonials

Chad was a pillar in making our event a success. He and his message resonated so well with our audience because of his down to earth nature and tremendous impact he has made. Often times, keynote speakers come on stage and seem larger than life and their inspiration is limited because the average person cannot see themselves making the same impact. Chad, however, is relatable and his humbleness is infectious to a degree that I heard our audience asking themselves why they aren't doing something more. Chad was chosen to speak at our event because I saw him as a dude just trying to make a difference and not trying to gain fame or notoriety. That's exactly who Chad is and he delivered far better than I had expected. I cannot thank him enough and I look forward to hopping on his barge when he's near Ohio and lending a hand.

— *Joshua Reams, Ohio Credit Union League*

"With his generosity of spirit and upbeat humor, Chad Pregracke brought his passion for activism for nature and people to our campus as the final lecturer in the annual Texas A & M University Kingsville Presidential Lectureship Series, and as Keynote Speaker for Earth Day 2013. Over a three-day residency, his many interactions with students, faculty and staff have super-energized our campus sustainability program. "

— *Laura Prange, Director of the Office of Sustainability, Texas A&M*

"Chad Pregracke represents what every citizen should aspire to be -- somebody who sees something wrong, and just goes out and fixes it. A man of simple yet powerful vision, singular focus, and enormous ambition to improve the world, Chad is carving a positive legacy in ways that precious few of us could hope to achieve. Chad was kind enough to speak to our regional leaders this past summer, and he simply blew us away! Full of energetic enthusiasm for his cause, Chad's high energy delivery and candid humor made me wonder why he wasn't a stand-up comedian. Nobody can motivate and inspire others while generating so much laughter, as Chad Pregracke. Chad Pregracke sets an incredible example of passionate commitment to improve the world for the better. And we should all seek to emulate him in our lives, in some small way. The world would be infinitely improved."

— *Major General John. W. Peabody, US Army Corps of Engineers*

Chad Pregracke's speech at our Pacific Northwest Section Annual AWWA Conference was the absolute highlight of our conference week. Chad is hilarious, but his content is extremely engaging and on point for any organization looking to get good work done. I wholeheartedly recommend Chad as a speaker for any business event, as I can't think of an industry where his high energy, values based decision making, and self-starter attitude would not apply.

— *Paul Manassero, Senior Consultant, City of Bellevue, WA Utilities*

Select Client Feedback

Wanted to drop you a quick line to say how wonderful Chad was. He had the entire audience laughing and engaged the entire time. He really killed it. His story was very inspiring, especially to our CFO (who was a bit skeptical about the idea of an external speaker in the first place) and former CEO—who wrote a check to donate to Living Lands and Waters the second Chad got off the stage. He was gracious enough to sign

books for as long as he could and we'll be ordering additional copies because 30 was definitely not enough. Thanks so much for all of your assistance!

– **Sarah Meyer** *Equinix*

Chad was fantastic - he was down to earth, funny, and truly genuine. Our audience loved him - gave him a standing ovation at the end. Our Board President remarked after coming back on stage that he had just shook the hand of an American hero. Chad's story is remarkable and we truly enjoyed having him at our show.

– **Melissa Cummiskey** *Building Industry Consulting Service International, Inc. (BICSI)*