

John Katona *Continued from cover*

“Everyone has hardships and things they’re dealing with in life, and having a disability is just another of those things. If there is data to suggest depression is higher for people who are wheelchair

users, I would guess this is because the necessary enablers for independence are not in place. I’m fortunate to own a house and a car; and I’m not in debt and I have healthcare and friends and family. Access to affordable

transportation, housing, and healthcare, or lack of job opportunity, could contribute to depression. If we can improve accessibility and lower those costs, others with similar injuries as I have will be less likely to be depressed, too.

Katona is employed full-time as an engineer for General Motors (GM). Currently, like many employees, he mostly works from home, going into the office once a week, noting that it is easier to collaborate when “everyone is in the same room.” He has dedicated his career to ergonomics within the automotive industry. He was hired at GM when a recruiter reached out to him for a job in throughput simulation, which he was researching while in grad school at OU.

“I worked there for four years, then switched to human factors, which is engineering usability in vehicles, making sure there is enough of what the customer wants, like USB ports, everywhere.”

Katona has been with GM for about eight years, noting that “it was my first



job that didn’t involve dish-washing or teaching engineering. I would love to teach again someday, but working in accessibility is a dream right now.”

He shares that he doesn’t have a typical work day and that there are “more boring days” where he’s attending meetings or working on presentations or spreadsheets. Usually there’s an in-person vehicle review or innovation workshop or working meeting to solve process problems. “And sometimes we go to a cider mill. The culture on my team is really great.”

Katona is a member of GM Able, which is the employee resource group for people with disabilities and their allies. “The group isn’t just about making the workplace more accessible but also about making our products more accessible, which is what I’m really passionate about.”

Additionally, Katona has a passion for music. He opens his Shelby Township home, which has been converted to a music recording studio, to fledgling musicians. Named “JK (Not Kidding) Studios,” he is passionate about his evening and weekend musical initiatives, which include assisting many talented musicians to complete video and audio recording projects. The recording studio includes a sound booth, unique amplifiers, an elevator, sound boards, reverb chamber, synthesizer, and more.

Although Katona can no longer play the guitar, his good friend Tom Mihalis, also a GM employee, will ac-

commodate him. And while Katona is unable to hold a camera, musician-friend Christian Ohly, assists with videography. He has opened his home to feature performing soloists, bands, guitarists, and members of several orchestras.

“There are so many things to like and enjoy in this world, but music is pretty much my primary hobby. I wish I had time to do everything, but I’m pretty fixated on music. If I’m not recording a band in my studio, then I’m usually at a concert or jamming with friends. I also started a record label called “Bird Fight Records” with some friends, and produce a podcast called “You, Me, and Your Top 3.”

Katona is so passionate about kids learning music that his studio partnered with Accent Pontiac, a non-profit music program for Pontiac’s youth. “Over the summer, we got to show 11 middle schoolers what it’s like to record in a real recording studio, and they wrote and performed an original song,” Katona said.

To learn more about Katona and see his work and music in action, check out his YouTube channel, “Bird Fight Records.” One of many videos, “I Turned My House into an Epic Accessible Studio (Video for GM Able),” developed for GM Able, can be found at [youtube.com/watch?v=e4oeIkrtUIk&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4oeIkrtUIk&t=5s).



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