

# Who's the real Eli Grill?

"I'm a goofball," laughingly said Eli Grill, SSA General Manager at the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium. "But few people know that because I try and keep my demeanor professional."

He also describes himself as a diverse, complex guy who appears to be very simple. He said people can't peg him.

His perplexing personality may be a result of patterning himself after his father, who is also Eli's hero. "My father is a great guy. He's a renaissance man, a great athlete, a musician, and he speaks six languages. He's unbelievable. There's nothing he can't accomplish. He's a true gentleman and a scholar." His father is now retired from being a Lutheran pastor.

Believe it or not, Eli claims he was shy as a child and wouldn't talk to you if he didn't know you. When he hit high school, he said he started opening his mouth, and no one has figured out how to shut him up ever since.

Other than mowing lawns and delivering newspapers when he was a kid, Eli has only had one boss — Service Systems Associates. He started part-time at the zoo picking up trash when he was 17 and worked his way up to the General Manager position 14 years later. He has seen the zoo go from an above average facility to one



*Eli's favorite color is green, and his wife, Emily, has green eyes. The romantic duo also share a love of sports.*

of the top 10 in the country. Eli said, "I love this business. I love the action more than anything. There's a certain amount of intensity and urgency. I like to be in the center of attention." If he wasn't working for SSA, Eli said his ideal job would be a plainclothes detective of some sort.

Eli shared that smartest thing that he did other than choosing SSA as his career was to marry his wife, Emily. They met at the zoo; she worked in the zoo's development office for several years. It may be shocking that they became a couple as Eli said they have a "mixed marriage." He explained that Emily is a Cleveland Browns fan, and he is a die-hard Pittsburgh Steelers fan. "I'm lucky to have a gorgeous wife that also is a huge sports fan," he added. "Plus, she thinks I'm funny!"

When Eli has time, he enjoys a variety of activities, such as

weight lifting and golf. Also, he likes to read. And when he has time, he plays pick-up basketball with its emphasis on physical play, one-on-one moves and trash talking. But he did say as he gets older that it's tougher to recuperate from the sprained ankles.

Eli's favorite movie may be an excellent illustration of who Eli really is. **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid** is a 1969 American Western film that tells the story of bank robbers Butch Cassidy (played by Paul Newman) and his partner The Sundance Kid (played by Robert Redford). Butch Cassidy is the smart, savvy leader of The Hole in the Wall Gang. His sidekick is the charismatic machismo Sundance Kid. Eli said when he was younger, he saw himself as Sundance, but now that he uses his brain more than his body, he sees himself becoming more like Butch Cassidy.



*Eli was born and raised in Pittsburgh.*

## Fast Facts about Eli

- Is the baby of his family and has one brother and two sisters, who are at least 10 years older than he is.
- Favorite holiday is Thanksgiving — as he said it's all about food, football and family — the 3Fs.
- Likes to watch football, but play basketball.



*Eli enjoys traveling and experiencing the culture, the food and how different the world is.*