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Lowell & Barbara Levine

Raising Awareness With Their Anti-Bullying Campaign

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cover story **LOWELL & BARBARA LEVINE**

Raising Awareness With Their Anti-Bullying Campaign

Lowell and Barbara Levine have worked with each other for many years, and naturally continued side by side when Lowell found himself against a problem he desperately wanted to solve. While running for the school board, Lowell became aware of the need for a local anti-bullying organization. The couple has since made it their mission to educate, prevent, and assist in the effort against bullying.

A graduate of Baruch College, Lowell majored in accounting finance and economics. He spent 40 years specializing in corporate problem solving and profit making. He eventually went back to school and got his real estate license. He became a real estate broker and consultant.

Barbara grew up in New York City, and attended Manhattan College's School of Engineering and received her master's from NYU. She wrote speeches for a well-known governor for a time, and then went into business with Lowell. Together, the couple own Lowell International Realty Group.

For the past 20 years the Levines have lived in Florida, and only recently moved to Frenchman's Reserve, about 4 years ago. It was shortly after moving to Palm Beach Gardens that

Lowell realized the need for an anti-bullying foundation.

"3 years ago I was running for the school board," said Lowell. "While campaigning, I learned that the biggest issue among parents in the entire north Palm Beach Area, District 1, was school violence and bullying – more than the quality of education. I investigated it, being a problem solver, speaking to the Department of Education in Washington and Florida, and found out there are very few registered 501(c)(3) anti-bullying organizations in the entire country."

A 501(c)(3) organization is the most common type of non-profit organization. These tax-exempt organizations must have the purpose of being charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competitions, or preventing cruelty to children or animals.

"I couldn't find any in the state of Florida that specialized 100% in bullying," said Lowell. Many organizations were split between causes, and Lowell wanted to start a foundation that focused solely on an anti-bullying effort. "I found that it's very difficult to get a 501(c)(3), so I hired a consultant, and

13 months later the federal government called me and sent a follow-up letter stating that they had done a complete background check on me, personally, and said we were accepted.”

Lowell runs the Stop Bullying Now Foundation (<http://stopbullyingnowfoundation.org>), which provides professional speakers and counselors within one’s community.

The latest figures provided to Lowell are from 2013, with the figures from 2014 expected to arrive to him within the next month or two. Bullying is now considered the worst epidemic in the country for children. More children die per year to bullying and school violence related to bullying than due to any other disease or accidents.

The figures are staggering, showing that out of the 80 million students attending K-12, including public, private, and parochial schools, about 25 million have claimed being bullied in school. Over 200,000 of these children reported having a fear of going to school on a daily basis. The hardest figures to accept are that over 100,000 of these children admitted to having considered or tried to commit suicide. Unfortunately, over 7,000 children and teens lost their lives due to bullying.

“We lose 15 to 18 kids a day,” said Lowell. “What has complicated the problem over the last couple of years is cyberbullying. When a principal tells me the amount of bullying complaints at the school has dropped, I ask if that includes cyberbullying, and they say no. The other major problem with bullying is on the school bus.”

“I set up a program that does work. Number 1 is providing education on bullying awareness to all parents and adults. I teach them what creates a bully and why, what to look for in your child, what to do when you find out your child is being bullied, and then I advise them from there on. If parents do not get any positive results from the school district, they will come back to me and ask me to be their parent advocate. In the state of Florida, and most other states, when you hire a parent advocate it’s a civil rights act. Therefore, the school has to acknowledge you as their representative.”

Lowell will not only step in when needed, but actively looks to speak at schools and events in order to engage students in the K-12 age range.

“I’m an ex-college basketball player, and I understand sports, so I integrate sports with anti-bullying conversation,” said Lowell. “I teach them the 3 most important words

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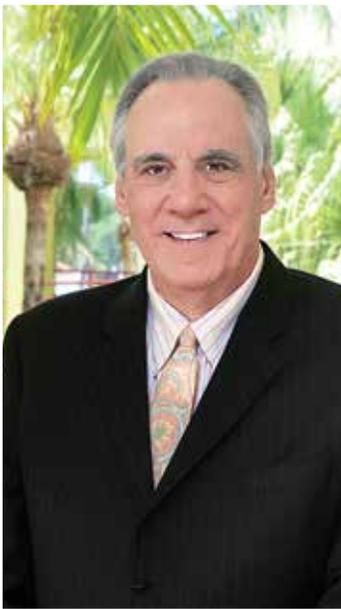
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to learn: leadership, teamwork, and practice.”

Lowell recommends parents of children who are interested in extracurricular activities, such as singing, dancing, sports, or karate, to enroll their children in programs or have them try out for teams. Participating in something the child likes builds self-esteem and self-confidence.

Realizing bullying doesn't only include those who fall victim to it, Lowell also turns his focus to those who cause the bullying.

“I help bullies stop being bullies. They all have to go into licensed mental health counseling.”

He has seen that bullying can provide some children with a sense of stability and control, which may be absent from their home life for different reasons.

“I tell the parents to never confront the bully. We lost 1,000 children in 2013 because they didn't want to lose their power.”

“The most important thing that we need now is sponsoring,” said Barbara. The funding provides Lowell the ability to travel and spread education on the topic, as well as going into a reserve that can help pay for children's mental health counseling if a family cannot afford it.

Lowell and Barbara Levine have a lot of work ahead of them, but the couple is fighting with everything they have to educate and prevent the destructive effect of bullying. With a long-term goal of finding solutions and building stronger communities, the Levines have begun to spread the much needed awareness and message of their anti-bullying campaign. ■

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