

The Avenger

Lowell Levine has made it his mission to end the bullying epidemic in Palm Beach County, where there are more bullying incidents than anywhere else in the state.

BY SANDRA BENAVIDES WEICHEL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON NUTTLE

Seconds after meeting Lowell Levine in the reception area of Realty Associates in Palm Beach Gardens, he turns toward the young receptionist and says, “I don’t believe we’re expecting anyone else, but if Barack Obama calls you’ll know where we’ll be.”

A natural jokester, Levine shells out a few more one-liners as he leads the way toward the conference room on the luxury division floor. As the division’s director, he navigates through the offices with confidence.

He sits down and he slips into further ease. He reveals he is originally from the Bronx, N.Y., but, it’s his accent that truly gives him away. And he discusses his business background – one that dates back more than 40 years.

But as soon as the topic of children’s welfare comes up, the levity in his tone is lifted.

As the founder of the Stop Bullying Now Foundation, Inc., an anti-bullying non-profit organization, the subject of bullying is no laughing matter.

“I’m going to throw some staggering numbers at you. ... In 2012, 20 million children in this country, K-12, were bullied and only 4 million of them spoke up to an adult; 400,000 children spoke about or attempted suicide because of bullying; 7,000, that we know of, committed suicide, and of that 7,000 about 90 percent of the parents and grandparents never knew their child was being bullied,” Levine, 70, says.

Levine, who obtains his information from organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education and the Harris Poll, has dedicated the last two years of his life fostering awareness on this issue he calls an “out-of-control epidemic.”

Levine was first introduced to the problem after running for the Palm Beach County School Board in 2012. “Palm Beach County is known to be the worst county in the 67 school districts in the state on bullying complaints,” Levine says.

There were 4,680 incidents of bullying reported in the state, according to the Florida Department of Education’s school environmental incident report from 2011-2012. Palm Beach County accounted for 1,144 of those incidents, while the second highest was Dade County with a reported 680 incidents.

So in 2012 Levine founded the organization and a year later received his 501(c)(3) non-profit status.

Through a theme called Educate Bully Awareness, Levine addresses the matter of bullying to children and the adults, so



they understand what makes a bully and, in turn, how to read the signs of a child being bullied.

Levine believes that if he could just raise \$1 million he could make Palm Beach County practically bully-free because the money will give him the resources to send mental health experts out to schools and communities. “It could be a model for the state and for the country,” he says.

Raising the money, however, has proven to be more difficult than expected. Even though he’s received support from companies such as Google, which has awarded the foundation \$10,000 of free advertising a month, he still faces a lot of rejection.

But that doesn’t stop him. From calling the principals and the department of education to contacting the county’s elected officials and providing medical health professionals, Levine is taking an aggressive approach of bringing the issue of bullying into the open. He is making sure he steps in before it’s too late because, according to Levine, “It’s better to have your child cry if they’re not given anything or if they hurt themselves from falling down than you cry as their casket is placed into the ground.” ■