

Attorney inspires, challenges others to help school
PAGE 6



**North Palm Beach • Palm Beach Gardens
Lake Park and Juno Beach**

Neighborhood Post

A weekly section of The Palm Beach Post • neighborhood-post.com

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: *Gary Lesser, 36*

Lawyer's inspiration helps elementary students learn, thrive

By MICHELLE MUNDY
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Gary Lesser learned the art of helping others from his grandfather, Joseph Lesser. Now, he's perfecting those lessons in his law career and with a new program called Challenging the Future.

The program started in September 2003 when the Palm Beach Gardens resident and others met at U.B. Kinsey/Palmview Elementary School for the Arts to brainstorm ways of helping the school.

Lesser said that's when he learned that the children didn't have any pencils for the FCAT, so he ordered about 2,500, which got there in about two weeks.

That's when he discovered the school also needed help in other areas.

By developing Challenging the Future, Lesser and some colleagues formed a group of businesses that would provide the school with tutoring, fund-raising and other necessities.

He started with a letter writing campaign, urging people to give in order to help send the school's fourth- and fifth-grade string orchestra to a national competition in Atlanta. People responded with \$1,500, and Lesser's firm, Lesser, Lesser, Landy & Greene in Palm Beach, provided another \$5,000. The firm also provides weekly tutors.

"I was amazed by the reaction we got," Lesser, a lawyer specializing in personal injury, said of both the fund-raising and tutoring.

Now the group wants to take its efforts a step further, and Lesser said that through public service announcements they will challenge other businesses to help local schools.

U.B. Kinsey's fourth- and fifth-grade classes are writing and developing the public service announcement with the guidance of NozNewz Communications, Target Media Group Inc. and Ko-Mar Video Productions. A tour of WRMF-FM 97.9 and WPBF-Channel 25 will teach those students more about developing the announcement.

Lesser, who has been managing partner at the firm for five



CYDNEY SCOTT/Staff Photographer

years, met his wife, Jennifer, at the University of Miami law school when he was a third-year student and she was a first-year student.

"I told her I wanted to help her with her studies, but she knew the truth," he laughs.

The couple now has two children, Lillian, 6, and Josie, 3.

Lesser, who is chair of the Florida Bar professional ethics committee through June 2004, said his grandfather inspired him to become a lawyer. It was the elder Lesser who originally came to the area in the mid-1920s. He started the law firm in 1927. Lesser's father, Shepard Lesser, inherited the

firm when Joseph Lesser retired.

"He was the greatest guy I ever knew. I wanted to become a lawyer, so I could work with him and be like him. I always stuck to that goal," he said of the man whose briefcase sits by his desk.

"The older I became . . . I got a greater understanding of what he did. To me being a lawyer means helping people. That's what I figured out on my own and through his example."

What are your hobbies?

Tennis, reading history books, and spending time with his family.

What is your favorite book?

Integrity by Samuel Carter.

If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

Abraham Lincoln. "He was a very good president in one of the toughest times in our history . . . It's easy to be a good guy in good times," Lesser said, adding that it's the tough times that show exactly who a person is.

Who was your biggest role model?

His grandfather, Joe Lesser. "I lived about a mile away from him and saw him about twice a week. He was a warm and sincere man. He was a great role model for me."

© michelle_mundy@pbpost.com

Attorney Gary Lesser started Challenging the Future, which helps students at Kinsey/Palmview Elementary School for the Arts with fundraising, tutoring and other needs. Lesser is sitting in front of a portrait of his grandfather, Joseph, who inspired him to become a lawyer.