

JournalNews

Edgemont lawyer 'a blessing' for inner-city charity

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EDGEMONT -- As a personal-injury attorney, Jeff Korek has fought for decades to help accident victims and their families .

But it's the Edgemont resident's work on another court that could be making the biggest difference in people's lives.

Korek and his firm, Gersowitz, Libo, & Korek, are the primary sponsors of The Gardiner Memorial Basketball Classic, an annual charity event held in the Bronx.

Dexter Gardiner, who grew up in the borough, started the tournament four years ago after several family members, including his twin brother, were killed in a car accident. His mother and sister died the same year.

The tournament is a way for Gardiner to honor the memory of his loved ones. It's a fun weekend for local residents and -- with Korek's help -- children and families are given laptop computers, flat-screen televisions, school supplies and college scholarships.

Korek, 48, an avid basketball player, says he shares the tournament's goal of transforming tragedy into hope.

"I thought it was unbelievable that one person could have so much loss," he says. "But I thought it was equally impressive that Dexter could take so much joy in helping so many others in the community."

Gardiner says the tournament is his thank you to a community that showered him with donations to help bury his family members.

"I just wanted to give back to the community in any way possible," says Gardiner, 43, a married father of three. "Helping kids go to school, keeping them off the street. When Jeff got involved the vision just widened. It just got bigger."

Korek, who has lived in Edgemont for 13 years, began his career in 1986 and has worked at several firms, including the law offices of F. Lee Bailey, the noted defense attorney. Over the years, he became involved in various charities, sitting on the board of directors of Hoops for Hope, which provides sports and life skills programs for children in

Africa, and working with The Sarah Jane Brain Injury Foundation, which aims to improve care and treatment for children with acquired brain injuries.

Korek and Gardiner played together in basketball leagues in Dobbs Ferry and White Plains. Introduced by a mutual friend, the two bonded on the basketball court, but for a long time Korek was not aware of the tragedy that had befallen Gardiner.

On July 9, 2006, five of Gardiner's relatives -- his twin, a niece, two nephews and his brother-in-law -- and a family friend were killed in a car accident on the Bronx River Parkway.

"He never said a word to me about any of this," Korek recalls. "Rather than shrinking and digging himself a hole and hiding, he did exactly the opposite and did something positive in the memory of his family ."

After one game in 2008, Gardiner handed out fliers to his teammates, seeking sponsors for the tournament. He had been running the tournament for three years prior, but couldn't continue it himself.

Impressed by Gardiner's resolve, Korek took the proposal to his law partners, who agreed to sponsor the tournament. Gardiner says the support has allowed him to give out larger scholarships, more prizes and to offer financial assistance to other families who experience tragedy.

After Korek's firm began sponsoring the tournament, Gardiner retained Korek as counsel in the case surrounding the accident, an arrangement both men say has nothing to do with the charity.

"It was a blessing. God sent someone to bless me," Gardiner says of Korek. "When I lost my family I was mad at the world. But the community embraced me by giving me encouraging words and that's what I want to give back."

That's a sentiment Korek shares. Whether in the courtroom or on the basketball court, he says he hopes to make a difference.

"Representing people and helping families is pretty much what we do," Korek says. "It's a passion and a cause."

For more information

Visit <http://thegardinerfoundation.org> to learn more about The Gardiner Memorial Basketball Classic.