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Men to Spend Fathers' Day Pushing for Women's Safety

By Paul R. Charron - WeNews commentator

Editor's Note: The following is a commentary. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women's eNews.

(WOMENSENEWS) – On Father's Day more than 400 men from all walks of life will be recognized for committing to teach boys that violence does not equal strength.

These "Founding Fathers," as they are called, are participating in a campaign organized by the San Francisco-based Family Violence Prevention Fund. Now in its second year, this initiative is mobilizing men across the country to take a stand against violence by pledging to serve as role models by teaching boys that violence against women and children is always wrong.

Better-known Founding Fathers include such modern day heroes as Joe Torre, the manager of the New York Yankees who founded the Joe Torre Safe at Home Foundation, which develops educational programs aimed at ending the cycle of domestic violence and saving lives. The Founding Fathers initiative is also led by business leaders such as Ted Waitt, founder and chair of Gateway Computers, and Jerome Rossi, president of HomeGoods. Our numbers also include entertainers such as Chris Rock and Bill Cosby and hundreds of others who are fathers, uncles and coaches.

By participating in this campaign, these men are standing together to speak with one voice to say "no more" to violence against women. I will be right there with them.

I am a Founding Father because it offers me a public way to communicate my passion for this issue and to share this mission with other, like-minded men.

I am a Founding Father in honor of my father, who taught me what it really means to be a man and gave his six sons the solid foundation from which our values – to treat all people with respect – were formed.

I am a Founding Father because I believe we all have a responsibility to serve as positive role models to the generations that follow us and I want my daughter and son to live in a safer world.

Assisting Women Harmed by Abuse

And as the chief executive of a multi-billion dollar company, Liz Claiborne Inc., I understand the value of delivering this message in the work place and providing employees with the support and resources critical to assisting the 1-in-3 women who are harmed by violence and domestic abuse.

The problem of domestic violence toward women has been gaining attention in recent years, but as a corporation, we have been involved in this issue since 1991 through our public awareness and education campaign. At that point, few people would even mention violence against women, let alone expect a fashion company to associate itself with it. But we felt it was our responsibility to give something of value back to the people who made us successful – women and their families – and could think of no better way than to shed light on an issue that was kept behind closed doors for too long.

Often considered a women's issue and undisputedly a social issue, domestic violence is also a bottom-line issue.

Violence in the home affects thousands of working women every day, compromising their ability to provide and care for themselves and their families. It decreases productivity and increases healthcare costs and absenteeism. It interferes with an individual's capacity to accurately, safely and securely perform her duties at work. It has an adverse and disruptive effect on employee morale and affects the financial strength and success of a company as a whole.

As employers, we are in a unique position to help those within our companies who need support, protection and assistance.

When Work Is a Safe Haven

For many victims of intimate-partner violence, work is the only safe place to be. Yet the stability of this "safe haven" is often jeopardized by the abuse; which does not stay at home. Instead, it haunts the worker as she travels to work and tries to perform her tasks. Knowing this, we have strived to create an environment of support within our walls and have become a conduit to agencies and services that can help our employees in need. This is not an undertaking one can take lightly, but it is something that can--and has--saved lives.

As part of our efforts, we have developed a range of strategies that provide assistance to victims and help to prevent violence in the workplace. These efforts include establishing a multi-disciplinary response team of personnel from our security, human resources and legal departments who help guide members of our staff – including supervisors – facing these issues.

We provide training for senior managers on creating a culture within the company that allows employees to speak up about relationship violence without fear of retribution or risk to their jobs. Indeed, our company has taken active steps to communicate guidelines for reporting acts of violence and to even provide guidelines for dealing with an employee who may be suspected of being an abuser.

In addition, we have created extensive education materials for our employees and the general public, including *The Parents Handbook* that details how parents can talk to kids about healthy relationships; *A Woman's Handbook*, to help concerned bystanders reach out to friends and colleagues and *A Teen Handbook*, to assist teen-agers in understanding that dating abuse and violence are wrong. *Tough Talk*, the newest guide in our series, helps men talk to boys about relationship violence in hopes of eradicating it in the future.

Private-Sector Response to Overlooked Problem

We find that our corporate-wide efforts, resources and strategies help our employees deal with their own individual pain and struggles. They also give us a cost-effective way to pioneer a private sector response to one of the most overlooked and underreported problems of our society, one that afflicts people of all ages, from every religious and ethnic group and all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Several weeks ago I sat in a room with seven women, all clients of New York City-based Safe Horizon, one of Liz Claiborne Inc.'s domestic violence agency partners and the largest victim-assistance organization in the country.

These are women who have not only overcome the violence in their lives, but are also making great strides in gaining financial independence and giving back to the community that helped them to survive. Each story was courageous, moving and inspirational. It reinforced in me the value of our steadfast focus on this issue and the importance of men becoming Founding Fathers. We can help change lives and give people hope in a future without violence for their children and themselves.

It is clear that if we are to make a society intolerant of abuse, men and women must work together to teach our children early and often how to deal with conflict and set examples of how to build healthy relationships.

Paul R. Charron is chair and chief executive officer of Liz Claiborne Inc. As part of his philanthropic involvements, he serves as director of The Partnership for New York City, Vital Voices Global Partnership and the National Jewish Medical and Research Center. Earlier in his career he served as a naval officer and is a combat veteran of Vietnam.

For more information:

Founding Fathers Campaign: - <http://www.founding-fathers.org/>

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