

# We're Still Standing

## Psychological Group Tackles Disaster Effects, Gay Intimacy

By Ian Drew

Directly across from the site where the World Trade Center once stood is a small church, surrounded by the rubble from the numerous structures that were toppled by the terrorist attacks on September 11. The 205-year-old St. Paul's Chapel and its accompanying graveyard is still standing with barely any damage.

Its 1794 Georgian façade structure remains completely intact, as does its steeple and stained glass windows. During the rescue efforts at Ground Zero, the Chapel, where George Washington attended services, was turned into a 24-hour rest center for recovery workers.

Similarly standing is the East Las Olas Psychological Group of Fort Lauderdale. The popular clinic hosted a special community gathering on Saturday, November 10 called Reflections and Ongoing Support to Cope with Terrorism in America: Moving Beyond September 11.

The free seminar was held at Fort Lauderdale's First Presbyterian Church and offered a group outlet for many people still shaken by the tragic events that took place September 11.

The group organized the discussion after noticing an outpouring of interest from their clients

and the community. Group Clinical Directors Richard Del Prete, Elizabeth Brochu and Belinda Lee noticed an upsurge in post-traumatic stress symptoms after the attacks within their practice. The group staff is a dedicated team of psychologists, psychotherapists and associated experts. They have seen a steady increase in depression and anxiety symptoms from clients who have also had to deal with being laid off from their jobs, resulting poor economic situations and having to move away to be with family in order to fulfill an increased need for personal security.

Mental Health Counselor John Newmark of the group says, "Many of my clients with existing anxiety disorders do not even realize how this has triggered them. There is a pervasive sense of doom in some of their thoughts that they themselves do not even seem to be aware of."

Brochu says that while positive things have resulted from the attacks, including the reprioritizing of peoples' lives, increased patriotism and familial bonding, the community still needs to know how to deal with their anxiety and that they are not alone.

The group initiated the gathering to give people an opportunity to express their thoughts in an openly communicative environment, and also to get spiritual guidance from Dr. Keith Riddle.

Riddle is Minister of the First Presbyterian Church and led a group prayer, in addition to speaking on the gathering's panel. Riddle, who has a brother who was not at work when a plane directly hit his WTC office, says that the highest attendance in places of worship ever occurred during the weekend following September 11th.

Lynn L'Hommedieu is a Senior Flight Attendant for United Airlines that was also featured on the panel. She says that passengers on her flights are now acting more considerate and less demanding, paying more attention to flight staff and not resorting to air rage during flights. While security measures are much tighter, many flight attendants are still fearful of both flying and losing their jobs. The group has treated many such flight attendants and has helped them to overcome these fears through both traditional psychotherapy and hypnotherapy.

Del Prete and Group psychiatrist Dr. Herman Teagno also spoke on the panel while voices from the community represented many different sides. Many openly expressed their experiences and fears, including political views ranging from the need to understand the opposition's ideology



Richard Del Prete

*"On September 13th, I realized that we found out that what happened on September 11th actually was happening on September 10th. We just didn't know about it. By September 12th, we knew that threats were out there and that we needed to then adjust our collective mindset. In my life, I have experienced the deaths of Martin Luther King, John and Robert Kennedy, Watergate and the AIDS crisis. All of them are related to grief. The situation we are now in is abnormal but our grief is not abnormal. We are grieving the world as we once knew it. Fitting these normal emotions into this abnormal situation is now our challenge."*

*-Richard Del Prete, President of the East Las Olas Psychological Group and licensed psychotherapist*

to support for President Bush's military efforts.

One speaker from the community, Cynthia Gray, gave a rousing speech about the need to put fear aside and move on. "I have always thought of fear as an anacronym for False Evidence Appearing Real," she said. "My television has not been turned on since September 12. I refuse to participate and live in fear because I have a God of my understanding who will determine when my time is up. I believe that the anacronym of fear can be turned around to mean Facing Everything And Recovery."

The East Las Olas Psychological group has always believed that being a part of the community is a goal and has sponsored similar public forums to address issues in the past. Del Prete founded the group in 1992 in the midst of a big period in the HIV crisis. A similar community gathering on AIDS was held in 1996.

The members of the group also work individually in the community. Brochu trains switchboard operators at the GLCC and works with the People with AIDS Coalition, Del Prete holds support groups at CenterOne, and Lee has garnered a reputation for her work with cancer patients.

The group's agenda will next feature a landmark workshop to be held on December 1. Conducted by Del Prete and Newmark, A Gay Man's Journey: Integrating Intimacy Into Our Lives will focus on issues surrounding intimacy that Newmark feels have a particular relevance to gay men.

Newmark says, "All of my clients are gay men and many of them have a problem learning how to connect with others within their community beyond sex. Many of them lack fundamental skills in connecting because it is often espoused as a culture that we have sex first and get to know each other on a deeper level later. Most just want someone to love them but won't often or don't know how to admit it. They then often suffer from strong feelings of loneliness and rejection. This group will create an environment where people can share and take risks without fear."

The workshop is designed for and by gay men and will explore ways to overcome barriers to intimacy. Through a series of



Dr. Keith Riddle leads a prayer circle with gathering attendees.

lectures, small groups and individual interactions, participants in the workshop will learn to enhance the intimacy skills they already possess while developing more emotionally rewarding ones. The main objective is to teach participants to learn to love and be loved with a more deep, heartfelt connection to themselves and others.

The group has already had other successes with gay men's groups. On Monday evenings, Newmark hosts a group focused on addiction and recovery issues. The group also caters to other sectors of the community including lesbian issues, cancer related issues and eating disorders.

The group features individual and group therapy, hypnotherapy, biofeedback and psychological testing. Day, evening and

Saturday hours are available, and fees are affordable due to the acceptance of most insurance plans and sliding-scale payment plans.

The practice offers a comfortable, confidential and home-like environment where the therapists often work with each other to provide a complete support system for everyone involved in the practice. Newmark says, "I have never worked in a practice before with the camaraderie and empathy among therapists that is



Dr. Belinda Lee discusses how she lost a cousin in the World Trade Center attacks.

here. I pinch myself everyday when I come to work and it always gets better."

The East Las Olas Psychological Group is located at 201 SE 8 Avenue in Fort Lauderdale directly behind the French Quarter Restaurant. For more information, call 954.768.0434, ext. 4000 or e-mail [ELOPG@aol.com](mailto:ELOPG@aol.com).

A Gay Man's Journey: Integrating Intimacy Into Our Lives will be held on Saturday, December 1 from 7:30 to 11 pm. It will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel at 1100 SE 17 Street in Fort Lauderdale. Admission is \$60/person or \$110/couple. For registration/information, call 954.768.0434, ext. 3200.

## Express Publisher Comes Face to Face with Gay Businessmen

The Express Publisher, Norm Kent, received a standing ovation after giving an inspirational speech to members of the gay and lesbian business and financial community on November 15.

Kent was the keynote speaker chosen to discuss the interaction between gay businesses and straight dollars particularly in South Florida at the monthly meeting held by Face-to-Face Florida. Face-to-face is a professional networking group in the Greater Fort Lauderdale area.

Kent touched on many issues from his multifaceted professional career as a high-profile attorney, writer, publisher, radio host, talent agent and community leader. He discussed how the straight community has

now discovered the value of the gay dollar and how straight community advertisers have flocked to The Express to do business with a community that has proven itself financially viable.

"We have come out of the closet personally and professionally. We have made tremendous and enormous progress by coming forth and speaking up. It has helped the different communities to connect and the need for a gay business newspaper like The Express has been fully realized," he said.

Kent also discussed how publishing Florida's Leading Gay and Lesbian Community Newspaper and its website helps to make business better for everyone by representing the community in a positive light. He touched

on the need to offer a spotlight to the community-at-large beyond the sensational and often misleading interpretations represented in "bar rags" and the mainstream media.

Community leaders at the function, held at the Bank of America Tower at 1 Financial Plaza in Downtown Fort Lauderdale, lauded Kent for his candor and commitment to the community. Kent has served on the Board of Directors of the Starting Place, a teenage drug rehabilitation program, CenterOne, and the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. He has also participated as a prominent local philanthropist helping numerous other community organizations.

Face-to-Face Florida meets on the

fourth Thursday of every month starting at 6 pm. It offers an organized forum for local business leaders to network and do business with one another.

Membership is not required to attend events and guests are welcome. Annual membership to Face-to-Face Florida is \$55. While membership is predominantly gay, all are welcome regardless of sexual orientation. A guest attendance fee is charged at events of \$20.

Face-to-Face's credo is reflected in a statement Kent made during his speech - "we all have so much more to gain by being together than apart."

Contact [billylooper@bellsouth.net](mailto:billylooper@bellsouth.net) for more information or call him at 557.6990.