

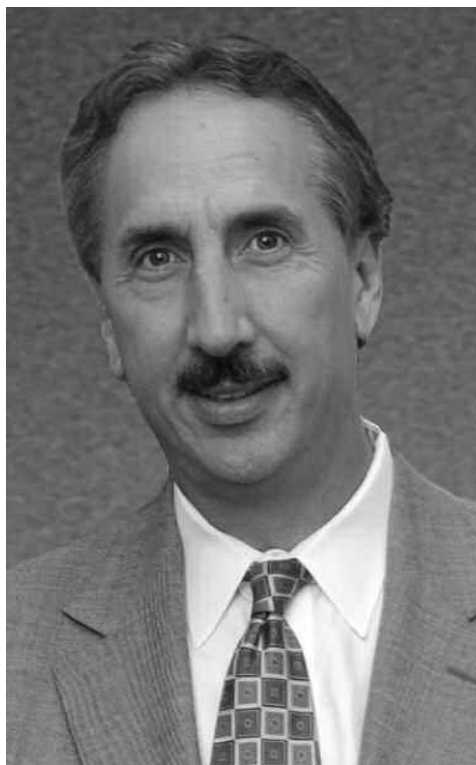
Honoring The Heroes Among Us – ... Mayor Rick Baker

The Office of Mayor has no “legal” responsibility for the nearly fifty schools located within the City of St. Petersburg limits – but that hasn’t stopped Mayor Baker from devoting his energy to youth and education issues. Realizing that the quality of education of our youth is linked to building a quality community, Mayor Baker has been personally involved in motivating corporate leaders and city staff to partner and participate in making St. Petersburg’s schools the best through various initiatives. For these efforts, as well as his year of service to community organizations, the St. Pete Bar Foundation will recognize Mayor Rick Baker as one of the “Heroes Among Us” – a lawyer who has made exceptional efforts to give back to the community.

During his tenure, Mayor Baker has visited every elementary school in the City of St. Pete and under his “Mayor’s Mentors and More” program commenced several initiatives to help our school children. He has helped raise private donations for hundreds of college and vocational scholarships, encouraged mentoring, and recruited corporate partners for each of St. Petersburg’s 47 public schools. Today, there are more than 70 corporate partners that support their partner schools by providing financial support, equipment donations, fundraising, strategic planning, and volunteering.

As part of his commitment to education,

Mayor Baker has encouraged city personnel to mentor. He created an administrative policy that allows any city employee to have



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one hour paid leave per week to mentor in the schools. Mayor Baker has himself mentored a student for the past six years. Mayor Baker also issued a “Cabinet

Challenge” to his cabinet members by holding monthly contests aimed at increasing the number of city employees mentoring in St. Pete schools. Currently, more than 160 city employees volunteer in the schools. According to Mayor Baker, mentoring is the most important thing one can do – a mentor can change a child’s life.

Mayor Baker’s commitment to mentoring was acknowledged by Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2002 when he named Mayor Baker the Chairman of the newly formed Municipal Mentoring Initiative. In 2004, Governor Bush recognized St. Petersburg and eight other Florida cities for their leadership in establishing mentoring programs in their cities and encouraged other local officials to establish similar programs. Mayor Baker received the “Municipal Mentoring Achievement Award” and the “Leadership in Mentoring Award.”

Mayor Baker has also developed other initiatives to benefit students and teachers. Under his direction, the City of St. Petersburg has begun the “A+ Housing” program, which provides financial assistance (in the form of an interest free loan of up to \$18,000 for a down payment) for St. Petersburg teachers who buy a home or condo in the city. The loan is converted to a grant after ten years of service as a teacher in St. Pete schools. Through his “Top Apple” program, St. Petersburg has become the only city in Florida to offer principals of A graded or improving schools



By Kim Gustafson

cash bonuses. Baker's "Doorways Scholars" program has provided college scholarships for at-risk middle school students and more scholarships for technical training. Awards are made to sixth-graders eligible for free or reduced lunch who stay in a city school, maintain a C average through high school graduation, maintain good conduct and attendance, and are drug and crime free. The "Doorways Scholars" program has generated millions of dollars (with exclusively private donations) for scholarships and currently has awarded over 600 scholarships.

Mayor Baker has also launched "Playing Close to Home," a program that is close to its goal of providing a playground within a half mile walk of every child in the city. This program instituted a joint use effort to build or enhance playgrounds and/or athletic fields on a school site so that it can be used by schools and the city's parks and recreation department.

Outside the office, Mayor Baker has coached youth sports (baseball and soccer) for years. Mayor Baker also serves on the Board of Tampa Bay Water, and is Chair of the state's Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida. Mayor Baker's service to the community includes many prior leadership positions in charitable organizations. He has served as President of the Suncoast Children's Dream Fund, Chairman of the St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of the www.stpetebar.com

Florida International Museum, and Chairman of Leadership St. Pete. He also founded the YMCA Neighbor Christmas Program and the CONA (Community of Neighborhood Association) Leadership Program.

Before his role as Mayor, he practiced corporate and business law for twenty years and served as president of Fisher and Sauls, P.A.

For his dedication and service to the greater St. Petersburg area, the St. Pete Bar Foundation will honor Mayor Rick Baker at the annual *Heroes Among Us* dinner on January 20, 2007. The event will be held at the Don Cesar Resort, and we encourage all attorneys to join us in recognizing this accomplished attorney, civil servant, and community leader.

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