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Sunday, February 8, 2009

YOUR COMMUNITY • YOUR NEWSPAPER

An edition

IN LWR

LOCAL, 1B

EAST WORD

A crowd of 350 sat up

and took

notice

when

tennis

legend

Nick

Bollettieri

addressed a leadership

breakfast for Take

Stock in Children of

Manatee County.



EAST WORD



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Ingredients for success and how to help a child

In only its second year, the Leadership Prayer Breakfast to benefit Take Stock in Children of Manatee County attracted a crowd of more than 350 to Renaissance on 9th.

River Club resident Diana Dill, program director for Take Stock, beamed Thursday as the crowd — more than twice as large as the first year's — took every available seat, and overflow parking was diverted to a field across the street from Renaissance.

Why such a large crowd at 7 a.m.? There are several reasons. First, it's a great program, which matches mentors with disadvantaged children and helps get them on the path to college scholarships and success in life. Second, tennis legend Nick Bollettieri, who is renowned for the young athletes he helps reach the pinnacle of his sport, was guest speaker. And third, with the state of the world being what it is, folks thought that a prayer or two might not hurt.

When Bollettieri, president of IMG Academies, took the podium, he proved to be an inspiring speaker.

In his late 70s, he still rises early enough to start teaching lessons by 5 a.m. and work with student athletes until 7 p.m.

He zeroed in on the importance of kids, the need to give them hope and to make the hope real. "You are better off leaving them as they are rather than giving them false hope," Bollettieri said.

Referring to a recent speech he gave at West Point, Bollettieri put the importance of winning in context.

"It's all about winning because your life is on the line," he said. Having an attitude of not being willing to accept second place "will give you a chance to become a winner."

But he cautioned that "no matter how good you are, you have to be surrounded by an outstanding support team."

He had a word of advice for mentors: Sometimes children need to be told things they don't want to hear.

"You can't always agree with the children," he said.

Other ingredients for success include being flexible — being willing to make changes, and frankly, being a little lucky. Then there's passion.

"If you don't have passion that comes from the inside, you're not going to be successful. You have to have that passion in every single thing you do, whatever it is," he said.

And character.

"It can be destroyed in one second," Bollettieri said citing the example of Olympic swimming sensation Michael Phelps, who was recently photographed with a pot pipe.

"His stock goes down 50 percent, at least. People will find it very difficult to forget that," Bollettieri said.

What does America need now? Bollettieri asked. "We need hope, we need faith and we need trust."

He talked about that speech at the U.S. Military Academy and said that the aura, the spirit and the tradition of West Point is enough to make you want to "re-enlist again."

Heck, Bollettieri had everybody in the room ready to re-enlist again, and more than a few saying, "Gee, why couldn't I have had that guy for my coach?"

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