

SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY

friends in high places

BEST BUDDIES FOUNDER ANTHONY SHRIVER DISCUSSES THE GROUP'S MISSION AS IT PREPARES FOR THIS MONTH'S 16TH ANNUAL MIAMI GALA.

BY BRETT GRAFF

On November 16, a group of deep-pocketed donors, Anthony Shriver, Zenith Watches, and the hip-hop group Far East Movement will all head to Marlins Park for a gala they believe to be a game-changer in the lives of people with intellectual and physical disabilities. For the event, the stadium will metamorphose into a Russian-themed winter wonderland, complete with white carpeting that will evoke a snow-covered boreal forest. More than 800 prominent philanthropists will come out to raise more than \$1.7 million for Best Buddies International, which works to foster one-on-one friendships—as well as employment opportunities and leadership development—for people who face unique “intellectual and developmental” challenges.

Shriver founded the organization in 1989—when he was a senior at Georgetown University—based

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BEST BUDDIES®



Shriver speaking at the second annual International Forum on Children with Special Needs in Doha, Qatar, in 2007. He originally founded Best Buddies International in 1989 out of his love for his aunt, Rosemary Kennedy.



"People with disabilities have real talent—they have something to give back and share."
—ANTHONY SHRIVER

motivating young people to become more compassionate.

How long do people usually stay with the program?

Volunteers commit to a one-year involvement with Best Buddies, but in reality, people keep these relationships going forever. I know one volunteer who was a groomsman in his

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on the benefits he believed came from the powerful relationship he maintained with his disabled aunt, Rosemary Kennedy. Today, Best Buddies touches more than 700,000 lives a year, including those of volunteers, job placement personnel, and of course the men, women, boys, and girls it helps achieve financial independence and emotional fulfillment.

Best Buddies raises more than \$30 million a year in the United States and about \$12 million abroad, where the money stays to fund the overseas chapters. We sat down with Shriver to learn about the challenges tackled by this world-renowned organization and the fundraising efforts that keep the operation going.

OCEANDRIVE: What should we know about Best Buddies?

ANTHONY SHRIVER: What we try to get across—and what people learn by participating in the program—is that people with disabilities have real talent and are achieving real things. They have something to give back and share. Historically, people have written them off. [But] not only do they get jobs, they become self-advocates, giving speeches in the community and

buddy's wedding, and many of them go on to hire the person with intellectual disabilities. Even when they move to a new city, the relationship is maintained online.

Can you share some success stories?

Lauren Potter, who plays Becky Jackson on *Glee*, participated in the program. Best Buddies gave her confidence and helped her self-esteem. She was able to realize her dream of becoming an actress, and today she's one of our donors. I have a buddy here in Miami. When I met him, he was sitting at home, watching TV all day long. Now he works at a Hyatt hotel, goes to Heat games independently, knows how to navigate the public transportation system, and can get around Miami.

What are some little-known facts about people with disabilities and how Best Buddies helps them?

For people with disabilities, there's an 85 percent unemployment rate, but we can bring it down to 10 percent. We have resources to get them jobs, make them independent, get them off Medicaid, and ensure that they pay taxes.

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Alina, Joseph Patrick, Anthony, and Chessy Shriver at last year's Audi Best Buddies Challenge.

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In addition to the gala, what does Best Buddies have in store for Miami?

We're bringing our Best Buddies Challenge, a 100-mile cycling event, to Miami. We hold [similar events] in Washington, DC, and in California—we ride along the Pacific Coast Highway and end up at Hearst Castle; there's a golf event the Friday evening before at Clint Eastwood's course [Iehama Golf Club]. There's a big cycling community in Miami, and the more events that come here, the more our leaders [must] pay attention. They need to make our streets safer, with lanes exclusively for bikes. It's a great activity for families, and it's environmentally smart. You'd see how many people would ride to work if they weren't in fear for their lives.

Why is Best Buddies so important to you?

We're not looking for a cure to anything, but it's almost worse to die in your head and your heart than to die physically. And that's what many of these people are doing—withering away inside. Best Buddies gives them a shot to get engaged. **OD**



With Donald and Lisa Pliner at the 2011 gala.

BUDDY UP

Attend the 16th annual Zenith Watches Best Buddies Miami Gala.

Date: November 16 at 6:30 PM

Theme: Russia!

Where: Marlins Park

Tickets: Tables from \$10,000 to \$100,000; individual tickets start at \$500

Entertainment: Far East Movement

Distinguished guest: Ron Book, who will receive the Spirit of Leadership Award

Where to buy tickets:
Call 305-374-2233
or contact sydneyfeldman@bestbuddies.org.