



**Pinellas Education  
Foundation**

# ChangeMakers Breakfast

Presented by Bouchard Insurance

## ChangeMakers Breakfast Celebrates Business Partnerships and Inspires with Stories of Commitment and Overcoming

**CLEARWATER (Dec. 4, 2019)** – It was a morning for celebrating vital partnerships, sharing inspirational success stories, and expressing gratitude to a supportive community. But just as the inaugural event had done in 2018, the Pinellas Education Foundation's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual ChangeMakers Breakfast ultimately became greater than the sum of its parts – a tapestry of special moments that united a packed ballroom in a shared sense of purpose.

That quality became fully evident at the St. Petersburg Marriott Clearwater during a new addition to ChangeMakers: the Champions of Education award.

Honorees Bob McIntyre and Jeff Nelson – each in their own distinctive styles – uplifted the crowd of nearly 300 in the same way they have raised up the Foundation and Pinellas County Schools through their unwavering dedication to education.



Take Stock alumna Valery Paul shares her story of perseverance and success.



Foundation CEO Dr. Stacy Baier, Bob McIntyre, Jeff Nelson and Pinellas County Schools Superintendent Dr. Michael Grego

Following short tribute videos showcasing their contributions, the two awardees exuded typical humbleness as they accepted their honors on stage from Dr. Michael Grego, Superintendent of Pinellas County Schools, and Doug Bishop, Chair of the Pinellas Education Foundation Board of Directors.

First came McIntyre, the gregarious former Foundation board chair, longtime board member, and passionate advocate and donor of the organization. For the man known to so many simply as “Bob,” it was a chance to thank his family for helping run the surge-protection company he founded, DITEK, allowing him more time to devote to Foundation projects. He told the audience about one of them: the [Stavros Society](#), the new giving society he and fellow board member Ellen Stavros, daughter of Dr. Gus and Frances Stavros, have championed to support the Foundation.

“This is going to change the way the Foundation works in the future,” he remarked. “Dr. Grego has said, ‘What will be the next Enterprise Village?’ Well we don’t know. But with the Stavros Society, we can find the program that will be the next Enterprise Village.”

Then there was Nelson, whose support of public education in Pinellas County has made a major impact – including his dogged efforts leading to the creation of Elisa Nelson Elementary School in honor of his late sister. In his straight-forward, self-effacing style, Nelson gripped the audience’s attention by telling the story of Elisa and what led him to establish Elisa’s Greatest Wishes in her memory.

“My sister was 10 years old, and there’s really no easy way to say it, so I’m just going to say it,” he explained. “Back in 1980, she was abducted and murdered riding her bike to school. Now, this was five months before Adam Walsh disappeared so the community wasn’t ready for this.”

“We didn’t know how to handle these things – especially the school system,” he continued. “There was no crisis intervention team. There were no grief counselors. So these 10-year-old girls went back to school the next day, staring at these empty chairs, wondering, ‘Am I next?’”



Jeff Nelson speaks of changing grief to hope.

From that shock and tragedy, a change-making initiative emerged three decades later. Some of Elisa's young female classmates carried their grief with them into adulthood, and one day approached Nelson with the idea of turning the loss of Elisa – who loved carrying a little chalkboard to help neighborhood children learn to read, and gave her own money to charity – into a life-affirming force. “They said, ‘We want to help carry on her legacy of helping kids be kids,’” Nelson related. In short order, he approached the Pinellas Education Foundation and, soon after, Elisa's Greatest Wishes was born, featuring a popular Palm Harbor Spring Fling 5K run as the centerpiece. With the help of local businesses, a half-million dollars has now been raised in less than five years to support education in Pinellas and other charitable causes. But, as Nelson described, that is only part of the story. The creation of Elisa's Greatest Wishes has changed the way she is remembered to the world.

“It used to be that if you Googled Elisa Nelson and Palm Harbor, you'd get hundreds of thousands of hits talking about how she died,” he said. “Nobody deserves to be remembered like that. Today, with Elisa Nelson Elementary School and Elisa's Greatest Wishes, you have to scroll down a ways before you find the negative stories.”

The powerful moment was just part of 2019 ChangeMakers, presented by Bouchard Insurance and supported by sponsors **Clearwater Gas, Creative Contractors, DITEK, Duke Energy, Long & Associates, National Aviation Academy** and **Verizon**, among others. The morning saw **Chick-fil-A of Clearwater** win Elementary Business Partner of the Year for its contributions to Eisenhower Elementary; **AMSkills** earn Secondary Business Partner of the Year honors for its generosity with Northeast High School; and **Duke Energy** being named District Business Partner of the Year for, among other things, donating more than \$1.2 million to the school district to fund after-school STEM academies.



Fox 13 anchor/reporter Sorboni Banerjee

FOX 13's Sorboni Banerjee emceed the event with her lively style and shared a personal connection to the importance of education: how her father escaped the poverty of rural India to become a physicist, and how her parents nurtured a deep love of learning in their children.

And she was moved by the program's student speaker, Take Stock in Children alumna Valery Paul. She spoke of growing up as the daughter of Haitian immigrants and how their belief in her – coupled with her Take Stock scholarship and the guidance of mentor Sarah Doyle – gave her the strength to persevere amid many challenges to become a supervising nurse today. As the crowd showered Paul with a prolonged ovation when she finished her speech, Banerjee interjected, “Take stock of that! That was so inspiring.”

It was a word that couldn't have fit the morning any better.



Valery Paul



(ABOVE) Left to right: Foundation Chair Doug Bishop, DITEK's Melissa Lostraglio, Ted Turner of Elementary Business Partner winner Chick-fil-A of Clearwater, and Superintendent Dr. Michael Grego; (CENTER) Left to right: Doug Bishop, Verizon's Courtney Barnard, Tom Mudano and Chris Halter of Secondary Business Partner winners AMSkills, and Dr. Grego.



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