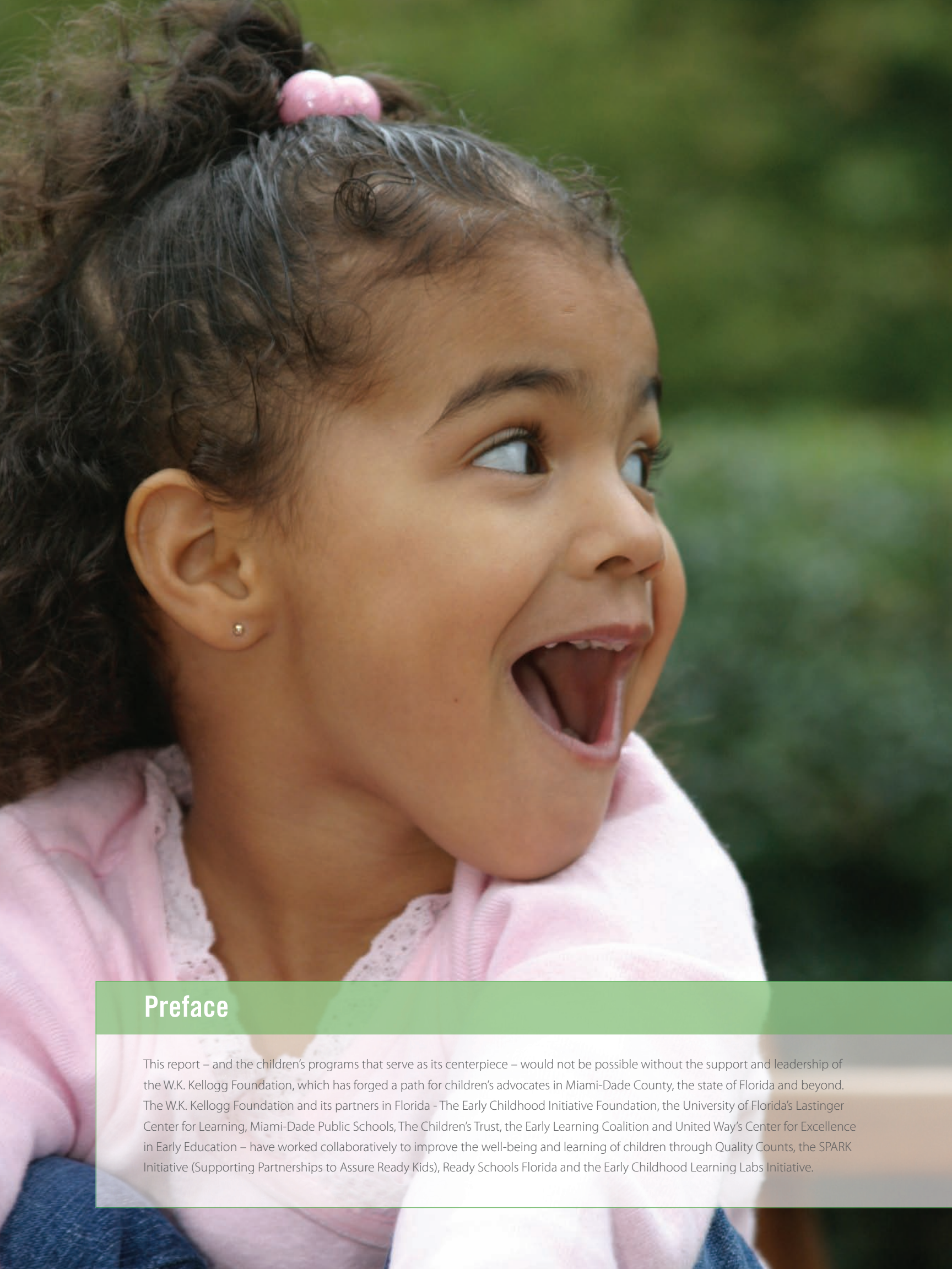


The Billion-Dollar Bet On A Community's Future

How The Children's Trust persuaded the 2.4 million residents of Florida's largest county to tax themselves during an economic downturn



By Martin Merzer



Preface

This report – and the children’s programs that serve as its centerpiece – would not be possible without the support and leadership of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which has forged a path for children’s advocates in Miami-Dade County, the state of Florida and beyond. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and its partners in Florida - The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center for Learning, Miami-Dade Public Schools, The Children’s Trust, the Early Learning Coalition and United Way’s Center for Excellence in Early Education – have worked collaboratively to improve the well-being and learning of children through Quality Counts, the SPARK Initiative (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids), Ready Schools Florida and the Early Childhood Learning Labs Initiative.

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Executive Summary

In August 2008, The Children's Trust of Miami-Dade County confronted and overcame a profound threat to its existence. Under a "sunset" provision included in an original 2002 ballot initiative, The Trust would disappear unless voters reauthorized it.

If that happened – if The Trust vanished – hundreds of high-quality health, educational and safety programs that serve hundreds of thousands of children would have evaporated. At least \$100 million of annual services would be lost forever – more than \$1 billion during the next 10 years alone.

The challenge was enormous. Children's advocates were compelled to persuade voters to tax themselves during an intensifying economic collapse – and forever. Nevertheless, a group led by David Lawrence Jr., chairman of The Children's Trust and a former publisher of The Miami Herald, shouldered the task.

This study examines and analyzes the planning and implementation of that campaign.

The report is divided into six main sections that survey the history of The Trust and its previous campaigns, the current scope of its work, and the creation, development and execution of the 2008 effort. It also includes, in two appendices, looks at similar efforts in Portland, Ore., and in Seattle, Wash. The study found that Lawrence nearly single-handedly raised \$1.64 million – enough to support a full-bore, multi-faceted electoral campaign. That campaign was mapped by Sergio Bendixen, a nationally known political strategist who was instrumental in helping Lawrence pass The Trust's original ballot initiative in 2002. Key roles also were played by their campaign manager, Susan Vodicka, and by Modesto Abety, The Trust's president and chief executive officer, among others.

The campaign was designed to be non-partisan and comprehensive, conducted in English, Spanish and Creole, though different tactics were employed for each of the county's three main racial and ethnic groups. It was critically important to make clear that The Trust served all children in the community – and, in addition, after five years of operation, with a vast variety of beneficial, high-quality programs. And the campaign had to be as pure and untouched by scandal as The Trust itself had been.

Bendixen, as is his style, commissioned numerous opinion surveys. The results were used to spotlight potential areas of resistance and mold individual messages for each voter bloc.

To win black votes, campaign strategists enlisted black-oriented radio stations and the county's wide, influential network of black church leaders. To win Hispanic votes, strategists enlisted Hispanic radio personalities with sufficient influence to offset deeply rooted Hispanic resistance to new taxes. To win non-Hispanic white votes, the campaign employed carefully produced, precisely placed television commercials, including a particularly effective spot that featured Lawrence speaking passionately about The Trust and the children it serves.

In addition, the campaign worked diligently to neutralize potential opposition, and it developed a muscular grassroots operation that drove extremely high percentages of targeted voter blocs to the polls.

The result: The Trust won 85.44 percent of the vote – including 97 percent of the votes cast by blacks, 85 percent of non-Hispanic white votes, and 77 percent of the Hispanic vote. All of these people voted to tax themselves in perpetuity on behalf of the county's children.

In accomplishing this, The Children's Trust employed strategies, tactics and techniques that can be replicated by children's advocates throughout the nation.

The full report, which follows, describes and analyzes the details of those efforts.

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"There are a lot of people – I know them and so do you – trying to do work that helps, that can turn it around, that can make things better, that can save lives.... And in this, though it would not occur to them, they are heroic."

– Writer Peggy Noonan, 2008

It's 2:45 p.m. on a school day and 16 children who achieved their educational goals weave themselves into life vests and clamber into a boat, bound for their reward: a short cruise to the mud flats of Biscayne Bay and the Stiltsville community of historic houses. Nearby, a giggling gaggle of kids race each other – and a few counselors – in kayaks. In a room overlooking this, a dozen youngsters labor over computerized math and reading exercises, each accompanied by a tutor. They and several thousand others are served by Shake-A-Leg Miami, which offers recreational, educational and social opportunities to children with physical, developmental and economic challenges. Twenty-two percent of its budget comes from The Children's Trust. Without that money, "this program would not exist in this form," says Education Director Ashley Sullivan.

Three miles away, on the 10th floor of an office building, seven people sit at telephones and computer terminals. Joaquim Fernandes takes a call. "211 Children's Trust Helpline," he says in Spanish. The caller is in Miami Beach. Her baby needs food. Fernandes punches "nutrition" into his computer, along with an address. One hundred and 14 possible referrals appear, including one for the Healthy Start program. Between October 2007 and September 2008, the helpline handled 51,569 calls in English, Spanish and Creole. Nearly 10,000 calls involved child or adolescent health care, including calls about suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues. More than 10,000 involved after-school care and other family-life issues. More than 10,000 involved food, shelter and other basic needs. The helpline is fully funded by The Children's Trust. "Cries for help," says Maria del Rosario Soto, the 211 program manager. "That's all we hear here."

That same day, a 13-year-old boy named Franklin walks into Room 4 at Jose de Diego Middle School, deep in Miami's inner city. The room is now a medical

clinic, part of a rapidly expanding network called Health Connect In Our Schools. Two cots, one scale, two desks, a supply cabinet, a few posters. Franklin has a headache and an ear ache. Maria Caridad, a registered nurse, tends to him. Nearly all of the program's funding comes from The Children's Trust. A visitor asks Franklin: "Have you heard of The Children's Trust?" Franklin says, "Yes." Visitor: "What do you know about it?" Franklin: "They take care of kids."

That, they do. None of this would be possible without The Children's Trust.

The Trust serves hundreds of thousands of kids in Florida's Miami-Dade County by funding, in full or in part, nearly 300 health, educational and safety programs. It created all of this in less than six years. And, in August 2008, it confronted and overcame a truly existential threat.

In doing so, it secured its future – and enhanced and amplified the future prospects of Miami-Dade's children. Their health. Their safety. Their educational and recreational opportunities.

Forever.

The Children's Trust also widened the trail it already had been blazing for a movement on the brink of going national. Clearly worthy of study for the audacious scope and diversity of the programs it has created and/or funds on behalf of kids, The Trust also now serves as a model for achieving another seemingly impossible goal: persuading citizens to tax themselves in support of these programs.

In a nutshell, here is why:

Under a "sunset" provision The Children's Trust voluntarily included in its enabling ballot initiative of 2002, the organization would disappear in 2008 unless voters reauthorized it. That vote was scheduled for Aug. 26, 2008. As it turned out, the timing could hardly have been worse.

The national economy was tanking, with the dual



Introduction

local bulwarks of tourism and real estate development in particular peril. Anti-tax sentiment raged from coast to coast and found considerable support in the Miami area. Several similar initiatives – mostly notably, the so-called “latte tax” in Seattle – had failed miserably in recent years.

In addition, Miami-Dade County is not a particularly homogenous and serene place, to put it mildly. Its 2.4 million residents include more than 1.4 million Hispanic people from a great variety of nations, more than 400,000 African-American and other black people from many backgrounds and places, including considerable numbers from Haiti, more than 400,000 non-Hispanic white people, also with varied backgrounds, and thousands of people from other national origins and cultures.

The place is crowded. It is politically diverse and sometimes extreme. It often is tense.

And yet, at this time and in this place, The Children’s Trust launched a full-bore, multi-faceted, Obama-esque campaign that raised \$1.64 million from 686 contributors and persuaded an overwhelming number of voters to tax themselves – in perpetuity – on behalf of its programs. For children.

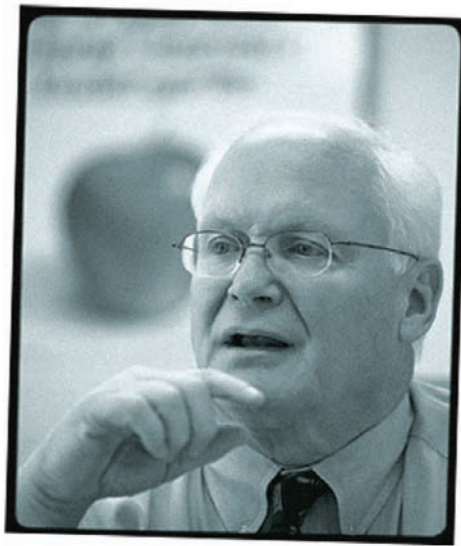
The tax, assessed at a rate that costs the owner of a median-assessed home less than \$60 a year, will produce around \$100 million every year. That’s about \$1 billion over the next 10 years alone. For children.

The contributions to this campaign, by the way, were not tax deductible. They ranged from \$10 to \$110,000.

“It’s pretty extraordinary,” said Greg Taylor, vice president of programs at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which commissioned this study. “No question about it. One of the reasons we want to capture information about how they did this is that it was such an extraordinary effort.

“It supports or verifies what I believe is a tenet of the Kellogg Foundation – to do something like this requires amazing leadership and also a comprehensive communications and engagement strategy.”

That leadership was provided by David Lawrence Jr., chairman of The Children’s Trust, former publisher



of The Miami Herald and, by all accounts, the single most important figure in the creation of The Trust, the development of its programs, the campaign to preserve it, and – now – the effort to build a national movement based on it.

“We have 797,000 children in Florida without health insurance [125,000 of those in Miami-Dade] and 18.8 percent of all the children in this country without health insurance,” Lawrence said. “My God, we’re surely a better people than that. Any country that can spend \$400 million a day to bring democracy to Iraq probably can do better by its own children.”

To be sure, other U.S. counties or cities have

enjoyed some success with similar campaigns on behalf of their children, but none approached the scope of The Children’s Trust’s electoral effort – or the portfolio of programs that effort was launched to preserve.

“It can be done, but it can’t be done if you don’t have certain things in place,” said Dr. Ruby Takanishi, president of the Foundation for Child Development in New York City. “The day after the vote, I told Dave that there should be a case study that describes how he did it.”

What follows is that case study, one that examines and illuminates the planning and execution of this remarkable ballot initiative. This report, presented in sections and accompanied by several appendices, is intended to serve as a “lessons learned” model for others throughout the United States.

“I think that what was done here could be done in any American community,” Lawrence said.

Those who work with or for Lawrence know him as a force of nature, a man of uncommon intensity, which is a nice way of saying that he can get under your skin, though virtually always for a cause that is right and good, even noble. Generally speaking, it is a cliché to say that someone doesn’t take ‘No’ for an answer. It is not a cliché to say that about Dave Lawrence.

“I got a note the other day from someone in Baltimore, who said, ‘Gee, this is really extraordinary what you did there, but we could never do that in Baltimore,’” Lawrence said.

Now, his voice rises.

“Don’t give me that,” he said. “If you can do it in Miami, you can do it anywhere.” ■

Applying Lessons Painfully Learned

“You had to make the case that it was about the entire community.”

– David Lawrence

The triumph that arrived in August 2008 did not occur spontaneously or in the absence of previous hardships. The first lessons to be drawn from The Children’s Trust stretch back over two decades and, like many of the best lessons in life, some are derived from setbacks.

In September 1988, then-State Attorney Janet Reno (later to become U.S. attorney general) and others led a campaign to establish a Juvenile Welfare Board that would serve Miami-Dade’s most disadvantaged children. The effort was based on a Florida law that allows any county to establish a dedicated funding source for children, if the citizenry votes for it.

The initial concept passed by a 2-1 margin. No problem. How could you vote against kids? Two months later, however, those same voters turned around and rejected a measure, again by a 2-1 margin, to actually fund the board with a half-mill (50 cents per \$1,000 valuation) property tax.

First lesson: Most people support children’s programs in theory, but getting them to pay for these programs is a much more difficult matter.

Ultimately, the county commission stepped up and established a Children’s Services Council, but with almost no government funding. A few grants, however, permitted the group to conduct research, produce some reports, develop a few modest programs and an advocacy agenda that began to build a constituency for children, according to Modesto (Mo) Abety, who headed the council.

And there it stood for 12 years, until Dave Lawrence and others took a renewed interest. The hard-driving publisher of The Miami Herald since 1989, Lawrence was unfamiliar with the challenges of early education until then-Gov. Lawton Chiles recruited him in 1996 to serve on the Governor’s Commission on Education and, then, to chair its school readiness task force.

What Lawrence learned shocked him.

“I’m a full graduate of public schools, but we’re now in a significantly different world,” he said recently, recalling his initial impressions. “We’ve let go of a lot of the fundamentals.

“In the last 25 years in this country, we’ve taken

away great gobs of art, gym, music, recess – believe it or not – and school nurses. And unless the private sector gets involved in this – some of it funding, but principally advocacy – we’re doomed to simply wither away on these sorts of fundamentals.”

And more...

“I didn’t realize that one out of every 10 children in the United States is a child with a special need. It could be a neurologically based learning disability. It could be many, many other things. Most neurologically based learning disabilities are discovered at age 8 or 9. How tragic that is. If you could discover it at, say, age 4, what a difference you would make in that child’s life.”

And still more...

Nationally, one-third of entering kindergarten students cannot pay attention in class. Studies show that 88 of every 100 children who have trouble reading in the first grade will still have trouble in the fourth grade. Sure enough, 32 percent of Florida’s fourth graders did not meet minimum reading proficiency standards as recently as in 2007.

Experts say that \$1 wisely invested in high-quality early education programs can save at least \$7 in money that won’t have to be spent for remediation, law enforcement, prisons, etc. (Some experts see much higher savings, as much as \$17 later for every \$1 spent now.)

It all resonated with Lawrence. Truth be known, he always had a tendency to tilt at windmills and here was a cause as worthy as any.

“I’d never even heard of the subject of school readiness,” he said. “I’m the father of five, the grandfather of several, but it doesn’t connect at all to me until I end up doing this assignment, get head over heels involved in it, get truly energized and excited about it, and ultimately decide in 1998 that I’ll retire in the beginning of 1999 and work full time on this.”

So, at the age of 56, Lawrence did. And typically, he followed several paths at once. A multi-faceted movement soon emerged, one that focused on Miami-Dade County and, in several key elements, the entire state.

Beginning with significant and still-sustained financial support from Dr. Jane and Gerald Katcher, a public-spirited Miami couple, Lawrence in early 1999 founded

The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation



Teach More/Love More
www.teachmorelovemore.org

The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation. Supported by private funding, the foundation served – and still serves – as the cornerstone of his plan to turn Miami-Dade and Florida into national test labs for early childhood education and “universal school readiness.”

Another lesson: *That “universal” part is absolutely crucial, at least in South Florida and likely in many other communities. Lawrence and others believed that the 1988 initiative (on which only \$30,000 was spent) failed, at least in part, because it focused almost entirely on disadvantaged kids. From now on, the focus would be on all children, especially those up to age 5.*

After all, every child deserves high quality health care, educational opportunities, after-school programs, and devoted nurturing.

“It wasn’t about those children, whoever those children might be, and that’s a fact that’s central to my philosophy,” Lawrence said. “The same principles that raised my five children are the same principles that raise anyone’s children, while realizing that some children in some families need more assistance than other children.”

Though sincere and noble, the philosophy obviously serves as an advantage when voters are asked to reach into their pockets or otherwise support new programs. This was clearly demonstrated twice within two months in 2002.

In both cases, Lawrence played a central role.

First, on Sept. 10, 2002, Miami-Dade voters approved creation of The Children’s Trust and, at the same time, assented to the same half-mill property tax levy they had rejected in 1988. The margin: again 2-1, but this time in favor. The concept had been created by Lawrence and Abety, who was still serving as executive director of the Children’s Services Council, with assistance from many other children’s advocates. “The Children’s Trust really grew out of concepts that Mo and I had together,” Lawrence said. The actual campaign was engineered by Lawrence and political consultant Sergio Bendixen, and it served as the model for the 2008 renewal-versus-sunset campaign that we will look at in close detail later in this study.

At the same time, Lawrence and Alex Penelas, then-mayor of Miami-Dade County, were organizing an audacious effort to thwart an apathetic state legislature and create a statewide pre-kindergarten program for all 4-year-olds.

Raising \$1.84 million, they launched a petition campaign in early 2002, navigated the treacherous legal waters of proposed amendments to the state

constitution, and ultimately gathered 722,000 signatures.

On Nov. 5, 2002, 59.2 percent of Floridians voted to approve state-paid, voluntary universal pre-K education beginning in 2005. Now, just six years after that vote, more than half of Florida’s 4-year-olds attend state-funded pre-K programs.

A penetrating study of the pre-K Florida campaign, written by Jim Hampton, a former editor of The Miami Herald, is available here and is highly recommended:

www.teachmorelovemore.com/docs/HowFloridasVotersEnactedUPK.pdf

Meanwhile, seven other Florida counties (of the 67 counties in the state) had been taking advantage of the Florida law that allows voters to establish new, dedicated funding sources for children. Each operates a little differently than the others, but they all fund children’s programs and collectively serve about two-thirds of the state’s population.

Nationally, a variety of county and city governments or other entities fund special programs for children, but few – if any – of those programs approach the magnitude of the effort underway in Miami-Dade County and supported by The Children’s Trust.

In early 2008, program manager Kelley Pasatta of Chicago Metropolitan 2020, a civic organization that promotes long-term planning for the Chicago area, conducted a study that was based on work performed by the University of Chicago. It found that many ballot initiatives around the country required the dedication of some existing revenues to children’s programs. Relatively few authorized new funding streams, particularly in the form of property or sales taxes.

In November 2008, for instance, voters in Oakland, Calif., narrowly supported Kids First! Two, an initiative that extends a previous program and requires the dedication of 2.5 percent of total city revenues to youth activities – delivering about \$11 million per year.

But ballot issues that mandate additional funding have yielded mixed results.

Residents of Portland, Ore., voted in strong numbers in November 2008 to renew a modest property tax that will generate about \$14 million for children programs for each of the next five years.

To the north, however, Seattle voters soundly rejected the so-called “latte tax” in 2003. It would have cost some coffee drinkers an extra dime per cup, with the money going to kids. Still, Seattle residents continue to fund children’s programs through a property tax imposed in 1990 and most recently reapproved in 2004. (Closer looks at the experiences in Portland and Seattle are available as Appendix I and Appendix II.)

Pasatta notes another complication for many

areas, though it does not affect Florida. Not every state allows citizens to place issues on the ballot. A state by state map and list can be found here: www.iandrinstitute.org/statewide_i&r.htm

“There are far fewer examples of funding streams established in states without the ability to add propositions and measures to their ballots,” she said.

“In Illinois and Chicago, one of the challenges we face is that we need to go through the state General Assembly or the City Council to get any sort of new initiative approved,” she said. “It isn’t simply a matter of getting the voters to back a measure, which makes it even more challenging in the current fiscal environment. States and cities are broke.”

And so, a movement was underway, but times were tough and a great test was on the horizon, rushing toward Miami-Dade and its children. The children’s programs in those seven other Florida counties had been approved in perpetuity. Miami-Dade’s had not.

The vote was scheduled for Aug. 26, 2008. It was all or nothing. The Children’s Trust and all it had created and all it meant would be approved forever. Or it would disappear entirely.

Mo Abety, now The Trust’s president and chief executive officer: “The money would have run out. It would have been gone. It would have been over.”

Dave Lawrence, now 66: “Lose this and the honest answer is, I wouldn’t be alive the next time people try it.” ■

What Was At Stake

“If this were to disappear, it would have been such a blow to our community, to the children.”

– Dr. Judith Schaechter, The Children’s Trust health committee

It is difficult to overstate the importance of The Children’s Trust to the county and its children. Health care, day care, after-school programs, literacy programs, the 211 hotline, youth violence and substance abuse prevention. On and on and on.

In short order, The Trust had become ingrained in the very texture of Miami-Dade’s life. A full list of programs can be found here:

www.thechildrenstrust.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=19

“What was at stake in the August initiative was the future of kids in Miami-Dade County,” Abety said. “And the hope that what we’re building here is a real movement for children.”

The Trust spent more than \$15 million in 2008 alone on behalf of children with special needs. More than 50,000 kids participated in after-school and summer programs. More than 90,000 kids were seen in The Trust’s in-school health clinics.

When it comes to child health, the need is particularly manifest: According to a recent report by The Trust, 19 percent of the county’s 571,400 children below the age of 18 are in less than very good health. One in three do not see a dentist regularly. One in five infants are not properly immunized. Eighteen percent of 6- to 11-year-olds and 24 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds are overweight. Ten to 15 percent of all children never eat fruits or vegetables.

Take just that one program – Health Connect, which provides pre- and post-natal health care for infants and their mothers, installs health teams in public schools, and sponsors community-based health services.

When many readers of this report were students, school nurses were nearly universal. Times have changed. Budgets have tightened. Priorities have shifted. And now, through much of this nation, particularly in inner cities and rural areas where the needs are most intense, school nurses cannot be found.

But that is not the case in Miami-Dade County, not any longer.

The Trust’s Health Connect network already has placed health teams – nurses, nurse practitioners and social workers – in 165 of Miami-Dade’s 350 public schools, and it aspires to bring that program to every public school in the county.

“When we were going to school, there weren’t health teams in schools, there were nurses in schools,” said Dr. Judith Schaechter, a pediatrician who chairs The Trust’s health committee and is a driving force



What Was At Stake

behind Health Connect. “The field of pediatrics and our society have changed so much that we need health teams in schools now, which include social workers.”

But at every level, government agencies ignore the obvious need and the obvious benefit.

“It’s sad what it says about education,” Schaechter said. “In education, we keep ripping things apart. While we used to be communities that took care of our own, we stopped doing that.

“The question really is a very deep one: What does it say about our society when we don’t pay for what we say is a right – quality education for all of our children – and when we don’t take care of our most vulnerable, which are our children?”

Schaechter was asked to describe the situation before The Trust came along.

“Children needed glasses and couldn’t afford them. Children who couldn’t concentrate because they had itchy skin and couldn’t see a doctor about it, or were not able to go to school and were failing out because they kept getting asthma attacks and no one could educate them about how to prevent that. That’s where we found ourselves.

“And The Children’s Trust stepped in to help. We were able to implement this vision of taking care of all children in our county.”

At one point during the 2008 campaign to reauthorize The Trust, she recalled, teachers, parents and students filled a meeting room. Having seen what was possible, what could be done to improve kids’ health, the thought of losing it again was crushing. “Please don’t take this away,” they said during the meeting. “This is the only health care we can get.”

For an outside view of another program, let’s turn for a moment to Ashley Stevens Kehoe, a Miami resident whose 9-year-old daughter, Zemias, attended the Miami Children’s Theater Creative Camp’s summer program, largely funded by The Trust.

“When Zemias started camp six weeks ago, she had no formal training in theater or dance,” Kehoe wrote in an e-mail to The Trust. “She was somewhat shy and intimidated to speak to adults she did not know.

“I can see the beautiful transformation that has happened in just the six weeks since she began at Miami Children’s Theater.... I thank you with the deepest and most sincere gratitude for funding programs like Creative Camps, and for the scholarship that has allowed my child to be in sheer delight day after day.”

And all of this represents just a fraction of The Children’s Trust’s programs and activities, just a fraction of what was at stake in August 2008.

“It would have been a tragic loss for this community,” said Diana Ragbeer, The Trust’s director of public policy and communications who took a six-week leave of absence to work on the campaign.

“Every other day, I run into somebody who’s a part of our programs. Sometimes, you’re sitting in a restaurant and somebody will see a card on the table or see your pin and come up and tell you what a difference you made to them.

“We really are on the right side of the angels.” ■



And So It Begins / The Strategy Takes Shape

“Sometimes you can do something beautiful, and The Children’s Trust campaign of 2008 was a beautiful thing”.

– Campaign strategist Sergio Bendixen

Chastened by the experiences of the late 1980s and by the prevailing economic and political realities, The Children’s Trust’s leaders and their supporters were under no illusions in 2008. Reauthorizing The Trust would require a comprehensive, sustained, well-endowed effort – one that would cut across the grain of the anti-tax sentiment sweeping the nation, the state and the region.

“This is very, very hard to do,” Lawrence said. “It’s a tax and it’s not really a happy time for taxes in America. The economy was moving into shambles and we’re asking people, ‘How about doing this and it might not even benefit your children specifically, but it might benefit the community overall.’”

Sergio Bendixen, the nationally known campaign strategist who served as Lawrence’s closest partner in the political effort, said the challenge seemed enormous.

“Most people would have said, ‘Mission impossible,’ especially in a community where in a primary, the majority of the electorate was going to be Hispanic or Cuban-American voters, who almost never support tax increases, with the notable exception of 2002, when they supported the Children’s Trust but by a small margin,” said Bendixen, a veteran campaign specialist, a pioneer of multilingual polling and president of Bendixen and Associates of Coral Gables, Fl.

“Cuban-Americans have rejected every other tax increase that ever came before them,” he said. “So it looked like it was going to be a difficult campaign at the very beginning.”

The Trust’s files show that Lawrence, Bendixen and others began mapping their strategy more than two years in advance of the August 2008 referendum. In fact, to some extent, the campaign already was underway on Sept. 13, 2006, when Lawrence asked a

Children’s Trust staffer to determine the median and average assessed values of Miami-Dade homes and what The Trust’s levy would cost those owners.

“This helps me considerably as I go about ‘making the case’ for The Trust,” Lawrence wrote that day in a “Some Help, Please” e-mail.

From that day forward, the referendum steadily gained ground as Lawrence’s top priority.

“I’m always nervous,” Lawrence said. “Getting this reauthorized was a really big deal, because it goes away, it’s gone, if we don’t.”

A few fundamental strands of the strategy swiftly occurred to Lawrence and Bendixen. Much of this was based on the careful, penetrating, repetitive polling that marks any Sergio Bendixen campaign.

Though somewhat obvious, especially in retrospect, these insights serve as vital tips for anyone attempting to replicate the effort:

- As had been the case in 2002, it was critically important to make clear that The Trust served all children in the community – and, now, after five years of operation, with a vast variety of beneficial, high-quality programs.

“The unifying concept, the overall message, was that The Children’s Trust has done work that was of importance to the community,” Bendixen said. “The research made it clear that as long as people were informed about what The Children’s Trust is and what it has accomplished, they felt the money was well spent.”

- Scheduling the vote during a primary or other non-general election can be a smart strategic move. The reason: Voters who participate in primaries tend to be particularly civic-minded and, thus, more likely to support these kinds of initiatives.



Sergio Bendixen

- A tax is a tax, but some are less painful than others. Thus, the modest individual cost of the levy – less than \$60 per year for the owner of a median-priced home – had to be emphasized.
- The campaign had to be broadly based, run in the county's three dominant languages – English, Spanish and Creole – and utterly nonpartisan. "This wasn't about Republicans or Democrats," Lawrence said. "And this wasn't about one ethnic or racial or national origin vis-à-vis another group."
- It also had to be multi-faceted – advertising, community outreach and media relations. It also included a surprisingly energetic grassroots component that eventually produced thousands of volunteers and 300,000 get-out-the-vote e-mails.
- A comprehensive campaign conducted in three languages and in a media-intensive market would be expensive, requiring a muscular fund-raising effort. The initial goal: \$1.1 million. The final fund-raising tally: \$1,646,765.
- But Bendixen and Susan Vodicka, the campaign manager he selected to run day-to-day operations and tactical oversight, knew that there was no need to reach and win over every single eligible voter, especially for a vote that would be held as part of a primary election. They just needed to reach the voters mostly likely to participate in the election in question, and that meant they could conserve some funds.
For example:
"We purchased a list of voters who always vote in a fall primary," Vodicka said. "We didn't waste money or time on people who don't vote in fall primaries frequently."
- Potential foes had to be identified and neutralized, preferably through a better understanding of the sheer value of The Trust's programs.
- The campaign had to be as pure and untouched by scandal as The Trust itself had been. Thus far, none of The Trust's hundreds of programs had been tattooed by bad publicity. Even The Miami Herald, a newspaper that had won numerous Pulitzer Prizes and other awards for its investigations of local corruption, seemed impressed. "The Trust has avoided even the hint of impropriety," The Herald reported as the 2008 campaign was underway.

"That was crucial," Bendixen said. "That was part of our message, because in Miami-Dade County, and I'm sure it's the case in many parts of the country, programs run by government usually have the reputation of being either inefficient or dishonest, and that was not the case with The Trust."

Known as the leading pollster of the Hispanic community for Democratic candidates, Bendixen and Associates was one of six polling firms considered by Lawrence for his first Trust campaign in 2002. Lawrence's polling budget back then was \$30,000, but Sergio Bendixen had another idea. He would do it – and more – for free, as a contribution to his community.

"He didn't get a penny the first time," Lawrence said. "This time, I said to him, 'This isn't right. This isn't fair. I want to pay you.' He said, with a big smile, 'You can't afford me.'"

In the end, Bendixen billed the campaign \$275,000 for his company's 2008 polling services, but most staff time, rent and other costs were donated. Bendixen's time alone, 100 days at his usual rate of \$2,500 a day, accounted for the majority of the \$378,000 that was written off as an in-kind contribution.

Why?

"We all have to do something for our community," Bendixen said. "Politics and campaigns in Miami have been very good to Sergio Bendixen and it's about time that Sergio Bendixen did something back for the community and show people that politics can do good."

It is not possible to exaggerate Bendixen's importance to the effort, another lesson emphasized by Lawrence. His message: Find yourself a professional campaign strategist and manager, and give him or her freedom to manage the campaign.

"I think it's important to know that he called every strategic shot in the campaign," Lawrence said of Bendixen. "I would push back and I would even win a few times, but basically my job was to raise the money and to raise the allies. His was to decide what was the wisest use of those dollars."

This is important, Lawrence said, because, whether you like it or not, you are running a political campaign – with all of the bells and whistles, challenges and potential pitfalls that entails.

"This campaign was not won because people love children," Lawrence said. "If it were won in that fashion, then it would have been won in 1988. It was won because it was a disciplined political campaign."

That discipline was enforced by Lawrence, Bendixen and Vodicka, who had worked with Bendixen on a

variety of campaigns and other projects intermittently since 1972.

By the beginning of 2007, a voluntary one-year sabbatical had recharged Vodicka's internal batteries, and she was eager to join Lawrence's new effort. On Monday, Jan. 8, 2007, the first working day of the first full week of the new year, Vodicka sent Lawrence an exploratory e-mail.

"When you are ready to begin assembling a staff for your campaign organization, I would like the opportunity to be considered for one of the organizational positions," she wrote. "It suits my skills, experience and desire to participate in something important in our community."

Seven minutes later, Lawrence responded. With a budget to manage, he was coy. He told Vodicka that he already was at work raising money for the campaign, but Bendixen was the man she should contact.

In truth, Lawrence was pleased. He and Vodicka had worked together during the 1994 Presidential Summit of the Americas in Miami. No one else was seriously considered. The result ratified the decision.



Susan Vodicka

"What a team – Susan and Sergio," said Ana Sejeck, Lawrence's top aide and chief operating officer at his Early Childhood Initiative Foundation. "She finishes his sentences. They knew each other. They understand each other. They can figure out what's going on just by the temperature in the room."

Vodicka was hired as of March 1, 2007, as campaign manager and executive director of the Children's Trust Political Committee, the entity that officially was running the campaign. An independent contractor, she was paid \$5,000 a month for part-time work through May 2008 and then \$10,000 a month for full-time work during the last three months of the campaign.

"I've lived here a long time now and I don't have to have children to know how important this is for our community," Vodicka said. "The beauty, specifically, of The Children's Trust is that it's an opportunity for the people living here to take care of our children. I don't want to live someplace where we don't take care of our children.

"I believed there was a good story to tell. Rather than having a political candidate that was flawed, we had a cause that was noble. And I believed that from the beginning."

Even before she came aboard, momentum was beginning to build – and organization and discipline were evident.

A Feb. 6, 2007, meeting among Lawrence, Abety, Bendixen and members of their staffs yielded a two-page memo listing five key elements requiring action, most with deadlines attached. (It was only the beginning. By April 2008, strategic meetings would end with as many as 37 unresolved items requiring immediate action.)

The five elements identified in the February 2007 memo:

- The generation of five lists of contacts, including board members of every organization funded by The Trust and parents of children who had benefited from Trust programs.
- Orders to begin submitting reports each time a Trust representative spoke to a community group or any other group. Each summary was to include: name of speaker, name of organization, date, and comments relating to audience reaction.
- The collection of every media article ever written about The Trust and creation of a complete list of media contacts.
- Development of a "Unified Children's Trust Message." Bendixen wrote: "It is of the utmost priority to develop a unified message for The Children's Trust. This 'discipline on paper' will help for all speaking engagements and [for] any other questions that those involved with The Trust may be confronted with throughout the campaign." Asked later about the content of that message, Bendixen said: "It had to be a message that basically made every family and every voter in Miami feel that they would benefit. That in the future there might be reason for them to use The Children's Trust for the benefit of their families or their children, notwithstanding how much money they had or their position in the community."
- The planning of meetings with The Trust's board of directors "to begin the development of a team that will assist The Children's Trust campaign."

That last item was particularly sensitive. Again, the campaign was of a political nature, and The Trust is funded with public money. That can be a combustible combination if not handled carefully.

Abety, his staff and The Trust's board of directors could be called upon for factual assistance and, under some circumstances, for advice, but for the most part, they had to recuse themselves from the nuts and bolts of the campaign.



Modesto Abety

“What we didn’t want was the perception and the real possibility that we might be accused of using public funding to finance a political campaign,” Abety said. “And so, my participating

was very arm’s distance and we continued to focus on administering The Children’s Trust. I was called upon for advice occasionally and would meet with folks when necessary after the work day was over.”

Importantly, this concern also extended to the contractors who ran programs dependent on Trust money. Lawrence, a veteran newspaperman who

knew the damage that could be inflicted by negative coverage, hammered away at that point relentlessly, often directly with his staff and with contractors.

“I am trying to make sure – even bend over backwards – to make sure that no one can say that I or anyone else connected with The Trust leaned on any provider to contribute to the campaign for reauthorization,” Lawrence wrote to Bill de la Sierra, president of an early education program called Kidworks USA.

Lawrence copied Abety, Vodicka and Bendixen into the e-mail, and added this sentence to it: “I do not want those who work for Mo involved in the campaign. They need to concentrate on services to children and families.”

And so, the strategic framework and the campaign hierarchy were coming into place.

Now, somehow, Lawrence would have to raise the money to pay for it. ■



Building A War Chest / Managing A Budget

“Dave is relentless. He’s a machine for fund-raising.”

—Ana Sejeck, chief operating officer of
The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation

The original fund-raising goal of \$1.1 million included \$50,000 for a bedrock “where do we stand” poll and \$50,000 for Vodicka’s salary in 2007, and \$1 million to run the rest of the campaign. That seemed sufficient – and sufficiently difficult, given the environment for fund-raising – when compared to the \$743,000 that had been raised for the 2002 effort.

But then, three circumstances compelled reconsideration.

First, in just six years, early voting had taken hold in Florida (and many other places). That extended the prime campaign season from four weeks to at least six weeks, requiring proportionally more money to be spent.

Secondly, the economy was darkening, adding to the challenge of persuading voters to tax themselves.

In addition, to Bendixen’s surprise, Vodicka already was seeing signs that she could build a wide and deep army of grassroots volunteers, motivated by a desire to help children.

In the age of the Internet and mass media, Bendixen had come to see little value in volunteer networks – at least for most conventional campaigns. But his own campaign for The Children’s Trust was the first of two exceptions to that rule in 2008. (The second, of course, turned out to be the Barack Obama campaign.)

“Was I wrong when it came to this campaign,” Bendixen said. “We were a lot more aggressive about energizing what we might call the advocates, the activists, the people who provided services for children. Thousands of people were mobilized.”

But that cost money, too, and more than \$165,000 would be needed to adequately support this army of children’s advocates.

In the end, around \$1 million was spent on television, radio and newspaper advertising alone. Polling cost \$275,000. Consultants and grassroots campaigns added hundreds of thousands of dollars to the budget.

So, the fund-raising bar was raised to \$1.6 million, even as Lawrence already was hard at work on that front, an effort that began in early 2006 and persisted through the summer of 2008.

Surely, the reader will think, fund-raising of this

magnitude was a team effort. Surely, David Lawrence simply led the team.

No, not really. Every document in the files, every account by those close to the campaign, leads to the conclusion that Lawrence raised \$1,646,765 from 686 donors virtually by himself.

“Dave takes it on as a missionary,” Sejeck said. “It was a tough time to raise \$1.6 million, which is what he raised singlehandedly – I promise you.”

How does one do this over a period of more than two years? By being obsessively organized and relentless. By delivering speech after speech. By following up every chance encounter with a phone or e-mail solicitation. By following up the follow-ups with additional calls or e-mails, on a regular, clockwork basis.

“Money-raising is a very personal business,” Lawrence said. “And lots of time, perhaps a majority of the time, you don’t get money the first time. It’s cultivation. It’s building a relationship. It’s looking people in the eye. You don’t raise money generally by writing letters – it’s personal contact.

“I always felt that I could sit down with anyone in the world. Give them enough time, and why should they refuse me a meeting? There may be a little bit of chutzpah in it, but that’s what happens.”

He set his sights on pretty much everyone, but especially on the big hitters in the community, hoping to reap large contributions from corporations and prominent, wealthy individuals.

Major six-figure or five-figure contributions came from Healthcare Atlantic and its chairman, Mike Fernandez; Lennar Corp. and its president, Stuart Miller; AT&T Florida and its president, Marshall Criser III; philanthropists Kirk Landon and Dan Lewis; developer Jorge Perez; retired savings and loan executive Charles Stuzin, and many others.

Lawrence worked hard to embrace all political persuasions, ensuring that the campaign remained obsessively non-partisan. Hence, contributors included well-known and generally anti-tax Republicans such as Florida House Speaker Marco Rubio and U.S. Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and the brothers Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart.

Contributions ranging from \$110,000 to \$10,000 came from 53 of the 686 benefactors and accounted

for about \$450,000 of the total, a significant harvest. In some cases, one visit, followed by a phone call or e-mail, did the trick. But, in many instances, these solicitations required ongoing Herculean efforts.

The correspondence with AT&T Florida, for instance, spanned many months, finally culminating in August 2007. It featured dozens of e-mails among Lawrence, Criser, lawyers, accountants, tax experts and administrative assistants.

Lawrence also took advantage, in a good sense, of a relationship he already had developed with local professional basketball star Alonzo Mourning and his wife, Tracy.

The 6-foot, 10-inch "Zo" and the somewhat shorter Lawrence had gotten to know each other during the 2002 campaign, when Tracy Mourning became interested in The Trust. Mourning ended up contributing \$10,000 to that first campaign. Now, during the summer of 2006, Lawrence met the Mornings for lunch in Coconut Grove. He asked them for \$25,000 to support the renewal vote.

Alonzo Mourning hesitated a moment, and then said: "Make it \$50,000."

Lawrence: "I almost have a tear in my eye and I am humbled and inspired."

Mourning: "Please don't say that. It is we who are humbled and inspired."

So, those efforts proved successful, though that was not always the case with others.

A lengthy series of solicitations to entertainment heavyweights Gloria and Emilio Estefan hit the rocks over the couple's policy of not contributing to "political" campaigns.

"This is deeply disappointing. Truly painful," Lawrence wrote to Frank Amadeo, an aide to the music stars, who was serving as an intermediary. "The Children's Trust can only continue its good work if we have a campaign to do so...."

"Last time the Estefans gave \$5,000 to the campaign. This is not a 'political campaign' in the sense of the usual politics. It is for a community asset that will be able to invest at least \$85 million every year into

early intervention and prevention. What could be more important?"

Still, setbacks like those were rare, even though Lawrence juggled dozens of these major fund-raising attempts simultaneously.

He kept track of them through what he called a "bring-up" file that reminded him when it was time to remind someone about the promise of a forthcoming contribution. Any new promise or suggestion of a contribution – generated through a speech or a chance meeting in a restaurant or theater – also triggered a dated "BU" entry in the bring-up file.

"If you say, 'Call me in two weeks, to the minute it will be two weeks,'" Sejeck said. "If you say, 'I can't give you that much, but I can give you some now and some later.' Fine, and when later comes, we're there. He is the most organized human I know, truly."

The checks, by the way, were made out to The

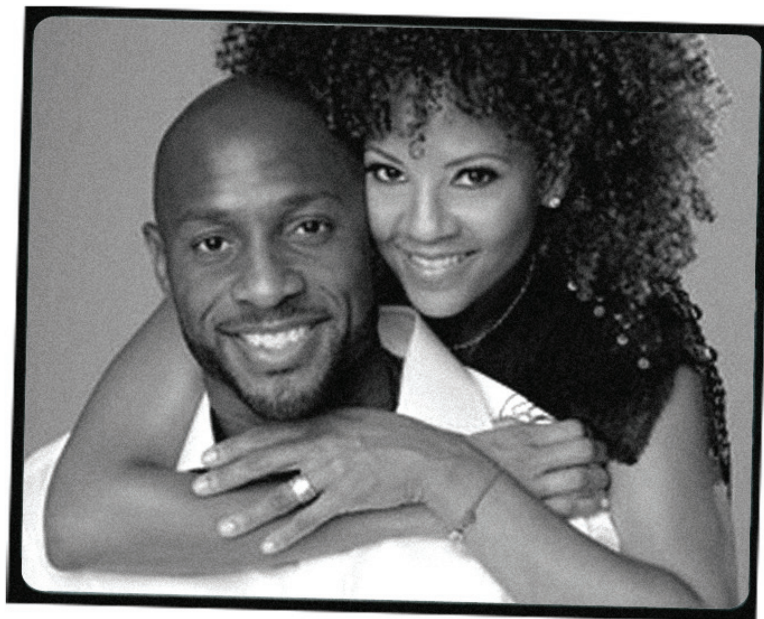
Children's Trust Political Committee and Lawrence asked that they be mailed to his home, rather than to his office at the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation "so I keep my 'political life' separate from my nonprofit work."

Another lesson: Be aware of every rule and regulation, every

filing deadline. A few tardy campaign treasury reports to state elections officials cost the campaign \$16,700 in fines.

So, in conclusion, fund-raising on this scope can be done, if one is sufficiently focused and willing to devote long hours. But, in the end, how does Lawrence feel about repeatedly asking for money? Did he grow anxious before a crucial meeting? Did he dread it?

"I never met anybody who said, 'Boy, I really love to raise money,'" Lawrence said. "So I don't love to raise money, but there is an exhilaration about it. How can I not be exhilarated when Alonzo and Tracy Mourning are saying, 'Make it 50?'" ■



Alonzo and Tracy Mourning

The Campaign Begins Firing On All Cylinders

“It started out as a jackhammer.”

– Campaign Manager Susan Vodicka

The stage had been set for nearly two years. Now, as 2008 began, many trains were moving down the track, pretty much at the same time.

Lawrence still was raising money, consulting with staffers at The Trust, meeting with people who ran programs funded by The Trust, delivering scores of speeches at local churches and synagogues and meeting halls, aligning allies in local government, and putting out brushfires ignited by potential opponents. Bendixen was working on general strategy and conducting poll after poll, looking for approaches that would work best, searching for pockets of voter resistance. Vodicka, on board since March 2007, intensified her efforts and started mapping her tactical framework.

Ballot wording

They also began devoting considerable attention to a key issue often not sufficiently considered by organizers of ballot-initiative campaigns – the actual wording of the ballot question. This can be crucial. For one thing, many election offices enforce strict limits on the number and content of the words that can be used. For another, the precise wording of the question can elevate – or diminish – support for it.

Research by Vodicka, aided by attorney Alicia Apfel, determined in early January 2008 that the question’s title had to be limited to 15 words, the body of the question could not exceed 75 words and it was legally prudent to count hyphenated words as two words.

All this took on great importance over the following weeks and months as the proposed question was written, edited, tested, rewritten and submitted to county officials. Keep in mind that, in Miami-Dade

County, this issue is magnified by a factor of three because everything written in English must be translated – with complete accuracy and no chance of misunderstanding – into Spanish and Creole.

On January 18, Vodicka worked up a “Schedule for De-

velopment of Ballot Language” that included 12 steps, a cost estimate and contact information at the county attorney’s office.

Using the ballot question of 2002 as a template, she, Bendixen and Lawrence had two versions of a 2008 question ready for testing by telephone survey. The two versions, each similar but with a slightly different focus and sequence of selling points:

Option A:

Shall The Children’s Trust, the independent special district for children’s services, be renewed to:

Fund improvements to children’s health, development and safety such as:

- Programs to reduce violence and keep children safe;
- After-school and summer programs;
- Programs to improve the educational quality of child care;
- Health care teams for public schools;

Promote parental and community responsibility for children;

Continue the annual ad valorem tax not to exceed one-half (1/2) mill?

Option B:

Shall The Children’s Trust, the independent special district for children’s services, be renewed to:

Fund improvements to children’s health, development and safety such as:

- Programs that improve the lives of children and families;
- Programs to reduce violence and keep children safe;
- After-school and summer programs;
- Health care teams for public schools;

Promote parental and community responsibility for children;

Continue the annual ad valorem tax levy not to exceed one-half (1/2) mill?



Bendixen and his firm conducted 500 telephone interviews between March 19 and 27, some in English, some in Spanish. Forty-four percent of the respondents were registered Democrats, 44 percent were Republicans and 12 percent were independents. The margin of error was 4 percentage points. It was the third significant voter survey since July 2007.

Both options tested well, but Option A yielded a 66 percent approval rate versus 61 percent for Option B.

In the end, Option A prevailed and made it to the ballot with only cosmetic tweaks in wording and punctuation.

Two other interesting findings of that March survey: 71 percent of the respondents identified “helping children” as their main reason for voting “Yes,” compared with 15 percent who said the programs were “necessary and important,” and only 8 percent who approved because they were aware of The Trust’s programs. In addition, one-in-five “No” voters said taxes already were too high.

The apparent “brand-name” deficiency and concern about taxes spotlighted hurdles that the subsequent advertising campaign attempted to overcome.

But that ballot-language survey was only one component of a vigorous and ongoing campaign of voter research.

Bendixen’s staff and others produced detailed analyses of those who vote regularly during primary elections, of the local Haitian-American community, and of other categories of voters.

In addition to several major, countywide surveys in the months leading up to the vote, the campaign leadership also ran a daily tracking study during the final month of the campaign.

Specific approaches to each group

Bendixen’s polling obviously found considerable support for The Trust, but it also revealed a worrisome fact. About 40 percent of the respondents had heard of The Children’s Trust, but only 10 percent thought it had touched their families.

“They were voting not only for a tax increase, but for an institution that didn’t really have an impact on their individual lives,” Bendixen said.

This informed the work of Bendixen and Vodicka as they tailored their strategy – which, in reality, were three different strategies. “This is Miami, so you had to have three very different strategies for the three major ethnic groups that make up Miami,” Bendixen said.

The black community

The March survey found that blacks tended to support The Trust by higher percentages than Hispanics or non-Hispanic whites, but black participation in elections – most especially primary elections – tended to be low.

The strategy: Launch an intense campaign to inform black voters, both African American and those from Caribbean nations, about what was at stake and then get them to the polls. The tactical plan: Enlist black-oriented radio stations and the county’s wide, influential network of black church leaders, especially Bishop Victor T. Curry, senior pastor of the New Birth Baptist Church, local president of the NAACP, and a long-time ally of Dave Lawrence.

Curry and other black leaders, including Darryl Reeves, a former state representative, brought scores of black churches into the fold.

“Through his [Curry’s] leadership, at least 100 of the most important churches in Miami became mini-headquarters for The Children’s Trust in their neighborhoods,” Bendixen said. “Almost every Sunday, there was some element of The Children’s Trust that they discussed with their parishioners.

The bumper stickers, the yard signs, a lot of materials went through the churches.”

Curry said he aligned with Lawrence and the campaign because “I believe The Children’s Trust has so much integrity. It’s just all about the children.

“I normally don’t endorse candidates or campaigns, but this one – I wanted to throw my full weight behind it,” Curry said. “It’s an opportunity to help children.”

Knowing the importance of personal contact, Curry drafted a widely known local public relations and marketing consultant, Da-Venya Armstrong, to build the network of churches and coordinate other ground-level efforts in the community.

“It was her job to galvanize and then mobilize the churches and the faith community,” Curry said. “She was able to bring the pastors together in meetings and luncheons, and then rally everyone to do something we’ve never done before – and that was to get the community to vote in record numbers during a primary.”

In fact, predominantly black precincts turned out at a rate nearly twice that of predominantly Hispanic or non-Hispanic white precincts. “Never happened before, may never happen again,” Bendixen said. “That



Bishop Victor T. Curry

had a lot to do with the fact that we reached so deep into the community, through the churches, through the radio stations, and through a wonderful group of organizers who worked their precincts in such a terrific way.”

The Hispanic community

The strategy: Offset an inherent and particularly strong reluctance to shoulder additional taxes. The tactical plan: Enlist popular Hispanic radio personalities.

“In the Hispanic community, our organizing base was the radio stations – the Spanish-radio listener, who is the heavy primary voter,” Bendixen said. “Many radio announcers went to the comedores, the dining halls, to the Meals on Wheels programs, to senior homes in the Hispanic community, where, in a sense, the Republican-conservative point of view is sold to them by these radio personalities. By being able to recruit them early on, convince them that The Children’s Trust was something worthwhile to be supporting, we basically neutralized what could have been the most anti-tax group in the community.”

One major example of leadership in the Hispanic community came from Claudia Puig, the daughter of a Cuban patriot executed by Fidel Castro’s regime. Puig runs Univision’s four powerful Spanish-language stations in the Miami area, and – accompanied by Lawrence and campaign consultant Freddy Balsera – she led a staff meeting at which she emphasized her commitment to the success of The Trust’s campaign.

“She was instrumental,” Bendixen said. “She really opened the door for us at her radio stations.”

The non-Hispanic white community

The strategy: Again offset anti-tax sentiment, and emphasize the universality of The Trust’s programs. The tactical plan: Reach these through carefully produced, precisely placed television commercials.

“It was clear from all our research that they would very much react to television advertising and to credible spokespeople,” Bendixen said. “And that is where David Lawrence, the editorial support of The Miami Herald, the print campaign that showed that we had ideological support for The Children’s Trust, not only from the liberals and the Democrats but also from the conservatives and the Republicans, allowed us to get the 84-85 percent support that we did from non-Hispanic white voters.”

Advertising

As one would imagine, the advertising element was seen as crucial and not just when it came to television and not just when it came to building non-Hispanic white support. Television, radio, print, Internet. All came into play, and the region’s demographic diversity was a touchstone.

The campaign budgeted \$718,000 for television commercials, \$237,000 for radio commercials, \$60,000 for newspaper ads, and \$45,000 for direct mail.

Bendixen and Lawrence agreed that the campaign – in its entirety – should keep a low profile until just six weeks or so before the August 26 vote. The thinking: Why give any opponents who might emerge more time than that to mount a counter-campaign?

When it finally came to buying time and space with those precious funds, Lawrence and Vodicka engaged media representatives in frequent, ongoing negotiations aimed at getting the most for their money.

Neither was reluctant to exploit the relative righteousness of a children’s campaign or their previous relationships or contacts within the media. Lawrence, for instance, sometimes squeezed former colleagues (and employees) at The Miami Herald for more favorable rates and placement.

“Alex: I really need your help on this,” Lawrence wrote on July 8, 2008, to Alexandra Villoch, the Herald’s senior vice president of advertising and marketing, with a copy going to publisher David Landsberg, now sitting in Lawrence’s former office. “How can it be that if we scatter 11 ads through August it is more expensive than consecutive days? Moreover, the Children’s Trust is just hugely crucial to the future of our community...”

The actual ads and commercials were designed to be simple, plain-spoken and effective.

“We were going for the gut in people,” Vodicka said. “This has worked well. This is something we can establish in perpetuity. You can trust this organization. It is completely independent of county government, state government, the federal government. You’ve done a wonderful thing in this community. Now, let’s keep it going.”

“We’re going for the heart first, and the head second,” she said.

On the print side, the campaign developed a series of three endorsement ads. Each pictured eight different respected community leaders of all demographic stripes: former Gov. Jeb Bush, school superintendent Dr. Rudy Crew, Bishop Curry, Lawrence, Alonzo and Tracy Mourning, Gloria and Emilio Estefan (no money from them, but they agreed to lend their endorse-

ments), and so on. The headline: "Miami-Dade is united for The Children's Trust." The tagline: "Join our co-chairs and vote yes on August 26th."

On the television side, Bendixen encountered another surprise. A full-production-value commercial featuring the Mournings played nicely but didn't seem to move the approval numbers his surveys were tracking.

Then, they tried one that simply showed Lawrence sitting on a chair, looking slightly off camera and talking about The Children's Trust.

"There hasn't been a whiff of scandal about a single nickel spent by the Trust..." Lawrence said on camera. "Trust is the basic issue in our community, and we've not abused the trust that people gave us. We kept our word."

And...boom.

"Two days later those numbers were jumping," Bendixen said. "We had been stuck at 48, 48, 47, 46, 48. We were in the 60s after three or four days. And every day it would go a little higher."

Vodicka called it a "turning point."

"We were concerned about our numbers," she said. "I don't believe we ever believed we would lose at that point in June and July, but we were concerned that our numbers should be up a little higher than they were."

"We could see that it [the Lawrence commercial] was resonating with that older, solid voter, who was definitely going to vote, and they just went, 'Aha, I know this man. I knew this man for all these years and I believe what he's telling me. I think he's honest.'"

They also used TV spots featuring Bishop Curry, local Haitian-American radio personality Piman Bouk, former Miami Mayor Maurice Ferré, and others.

A few days before the vote, now a little concerned about the Hispanic vote,



Former Gov. Jeb Bush

the campaign added a commercial that featured Jeb Bush. Though not a Hispanic, Bush spoke fluent Spanish and enjoyed enormous popularity in the Hispanic community.

"That was the other major jump," Bendixen said. "We put him up in Spanish. We had the

Hispanics at 55, 54, 56 for too long. Then he went on. Seventies."

And where did Bendixen run all of these commercials? Only one place, and it – again – was determined by voter research.

"News, news, news," he said. "The one common

denominator of heavy primary voters is that they watch news. We never bought the Olympics. We never bought prime time television. This wasn't the kind of campaign where you spend \$1 million a week on television."

All of this was augmented by direct mailings (including a "Dear Voter" letter from Lawrence), a website (with solicitations for volunteers and donations), bumper stickers, buttons, palm cards, lawn signs and the other, usual paraphernalia of a major electoral campaign.

Neutralizing opposition/damage control

Virtually no campaign proceeds without a few bumps and unanticipated problems, and The Children's Trust campaign of 2008 had its share. Here are a few examples, offered in the order of their occurrence – and as learning experiences for others:

- March 2007 – Lawrence began working on Bush, the former governor, seeking his financial support and public endorsement. Bush, however, expressed particular interest in program outcomes and accountability, a hallmark of his gubernatorial administration.

Paraphrasing, Lawrence remembers Bush telling him: I'm in favor, I'm not going to oppose, but truthfully, I worry that this is a liberal thing – giving away money with no controls.

Rising to the challenge, Lawrence responded with three lengthy letters during the next three weeks. Each laid out in exquisite detail results already achieved and the steps taken by The Trust to create and maintain rigorous standards. At one point, Lawrence forwarded a list of programs that had their funding removed. "We want our funded partners to succeed and we see it as partly our failure if they don't," Lawrence wrote. "We monitor closely and send outside contracted CPA firms to do fiscal audits annually."

Bush, as previously mentioned, ended up appearing in The Trust's television and print ads, and he also made a campaign contribution.

The lesson: Big fish are worth the effort it takes to catch them.

- May 2007 – An influential Miami-Dade commissioner, Joe Martinez, began expressing concern over a "fund balance" of about \$100 million that The Trust had accumulated. Was The Trust hoarding public money instead of spending it as promised?

Absolutely not, Abety explained in a letter swiftly sent to Martinez, other county commissioners and the county mayor. The Trust's five-year plan always envisioned the slow but steady "ramp-

up” of some programs, an alternative greatly preferred to an overly swift, careless approach. “These reserves will be depleted, as intended, during the final two years of The Trust’s five-year plan, and be eliminated by the end of FY 2008,” Abety wrote.

The lesson: Respond quickly and fully to questions from public officials and others, especially when the queries involve funding.

- June 2007 – “A very irate voter” called Abety and complained that, by funding some programs aimed at gay, lesbian and transgender youths, The Trust was “promoting homosexuality to children.” The caller vowed to lobby church-goers and other friends to oppose renewal.

Abety asked Emily Cardenas, The Trust’s senior communications manager, to craft descriptions that better explain the needs of these programs. “We’re not apologizing for funding these programs,” he told Cardenas in an e-mail. “The needs of this population speak to the need. We merely want to explain this better.”

The lesson: Again, respond quickly and affirmatively to perceived dangers.

- November 2007 – Somehow, some way, a batch of red Children’s Trust volunteer shirts ended up for sale at a Uno Dollar Store in Miami’s Little Havana neighborhood. The store proudly advertised the shirts’ availability in its front window: “Sale, Limited Quantities: \$1.”

This was a problem. For one thing, the shirts cost The Trust \$3 each. For another, they were given only to individual volunteers. That raised the possibility that dozens of shirts had been stolen, a breach not only of security but of The Trust’s hard-won reputation for careful management of its resources.

“It raises all kinds of questions regarding other equipment, recreational supplies, etc., that should be used by the kids in these programs,” Abety wrote in an e-mail to Pablo Canton, who runs the city’s one-stop Neighborhood Enhancement Team in Little Havana. “As you know, The Children’s Trust comes up for a vote of re-authorization by the voters in August of 2008. If there is any misappropriation of the public dollars entrusted to us, we want it stopped and the people involved brought to justice.”

Police officers ultimately seized the shirts.

The lesson: No threat to the organization’s reputation is too minor to deal with, especially during an authorization campaign.

- January 2008 – Four anonymous, critical comments posted on The Miami Herald’s website in response to a generally favorable article about The Trust attracted Vodicka’s attention. She e-mailed the comments – illogical, incendiary and grammatically challenged, as is usually the case with such postings – to Lawrence.

“This underscores for me Sergio’s wisdom in staying under the radar as much as possible until we get much closer to the election,” Lawrence responded.

The lesson: Maintain a low profile for as long as possible but stay alert for any signs of trouble, especially on the Internet, which can provide strong leading indicators of trends.

- Trouble also can come from inside, and with the best of intentions. Trust staffers and, especially, managers of programs funded by The Trust have vested interests in winning re-approval. They become anxious and they want to help, but sometimes they need to be chilled down a bit.

“People need to be reassured that the campaign is going well,” Vodicka said. “Sometimes, they need to understand why they’re not being asked to help.”

She and Bendixen said that Lawrence provided a real service to them by offering himself as a human shield and by sponsoring frequent meetings with groups of well-meaning critics and observers from inside the organization.

“In organizing people and leading people, I’ve found that the more information people have, the better they perform, the better they behave,” Vodicka said. “Uninformed people get frightened that something important is happening without them or that something is being mishandled and somehow it’s going to be bad for them. So, every few months, we’d bring everyone together and update them on how we are proceeding.”

Said Bendixen: “We had only one thing to worry about – win. If one of the activists or one of the board members or one of the fund-raisers did not like what we were doing, he [Lawrence] took care of them and he protected us from having to deal with all the people who think they know how to do it better.”

The lesson: Campaign managers appreciate the spirit of cooperation, but campaigns must be left to the professionals.

- The most potentially serious problem involved the ballot itself. On the day that early voting began, Lawrence, Bendixen, Vodicka and everyone else were shaken by a completely unexpected threat:

The Children's Trust renewal question had been placed on the back of virtually every ballot in the county – and, in some cases, it was the only item on that side of the ballot. Even worse, reports flowed into campaign headquarters that many election workers were not telling voters to make sure they turn over their ballots.

It was an electoral neutron bomb. Everything they had worked for could have been atomized right there, because of the ballot's layout.

Three months later, Lawrence's words quicken and his voice grows angry as he remembers.

"We were doing polling at this point and we already knew that something like 14 percent of the people weren't turning it over," he said. "Well, I went batty over this. I'm going to potentially lose this for the children of this community because it's on the back of the ballot.

"So I'm writing letters to the head of elections and carboning county commissioners, the mayor, the county manager. I'm calling the election supervisor. I'm not accusing anybody of doing dirty work or anything, and they weren't, but I'm saying, 'If we lose this election for children because people don't know to look at the back of the ballot, that's a tragic thing.'"

In response, Supervisor of Elections Lester Sola, nearly buried by letters, e-mails and phone calls from Lawrence and others, repeatedly advised precinct workers to tell voters to turn over the ballot, and – as we soon shall see – no real damage occurred.

Field operations/grassroots efforts

The final piece of the puzzle was crafted by Diana Ragbeer, The Trust's director of public policy who took a leave of absence to run the grassroots campaign as director of field operations. She started just before July 4, about six weeks before the election, and she started quick and hard.

"It seemed like a short period of time," Ragbeer said. "We did the learning curve in a very vertical manner."

She called it "a cradle-to-grave operation." It involved locating office space, training and hiring 10 field captains (each of whom recruited 20 precinct captains), developing a volunteer base, building an infrastructure that included computers, cell phones, and producing collateral campaign material such as bumper stickers and yard signs.

"All of the things that would energize the campaign and create some excitement about it," Ragbeer said.

She also had to staff 20 early voting sites for two weeks before Election Day. That meant 80 people every day, two shifts of four hours each, including weekends. And she was responsible for running the

telephone banks and sending volunteers to community events.

Ragbeer and Vodicka prepared training materials for the volunteers – telephone scripts, approaches to use during door-to-door canvassing.

Ragbeer's personnel flow chart looks like it was crafted at the Pentagon. Her Election Day precinct personnel assignment sheet runs for 26 pages and lists 390 names, just a portion of her full roster of 641 Election Day volunteers.



Diana Ragbeer

Vodicka, meanwhile, sent out weekly blasts of get-out-the-vote e-mails. They were forwarded. And forwarded. And forwarded. Hundreds of thousands of them flying through cyberspace, all within a single county.

"My message always said pass this along, pass this along," Vodicka said. "And I could see my own e-mails coming back to me. It truly was viral."

Ragbeer: "It had all the levels – the grassroots component, the advertising component, the faith-based component, the strategizing that was daily.

"Sergio Bendixen was seeking to elevate the campaign every week. He talked about wanting to come out of meetings with a new idea every week," she said. "So, if we were polling at 54 percent or 58 percent, what do we need to do to get it to 68 percent, 78 percent and so forth. Sergio was always seeking to add components that would drive up the level of success.

"It was a whirlwind, and I loved every minute of it." And it worked. All of it. ■



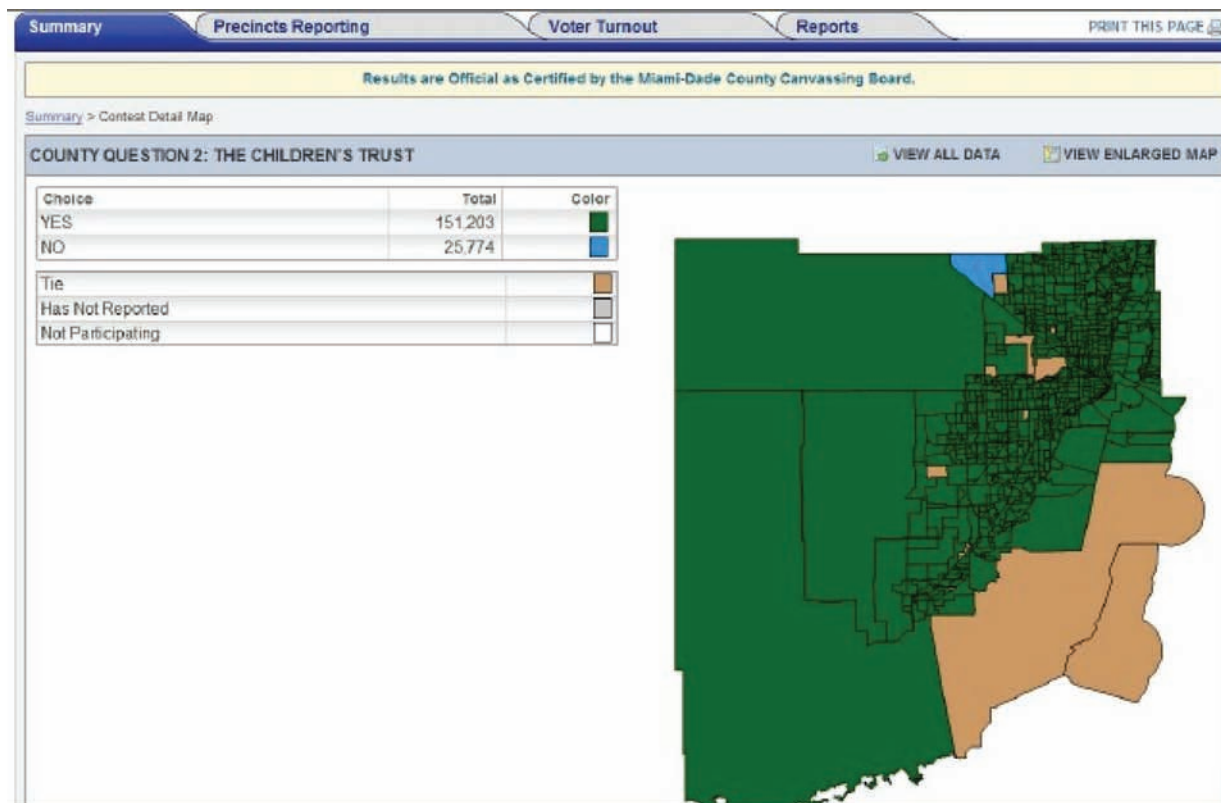
Triumph

“How blessed we are by this wonderful news”.

– Dave Lawrence, Aug. 26, 2008

And so, the people voted, and the votes were counted. And this was the result:

Yes: 151,203 85.44 percent **No:** 25,774 14.56 percent



Official Miami-Dade County Precinct Map

(Areas shaded in brown and described as “tie” actually produced no votes at all)

Seventy-seven percent of Hispanic voters voted to fund The Children’s Trust in perpetuity, along with 85 percent of non-Hispanic white voters and a remarkable 97 percent of black voters. Those margins probably would have been even more lopsided if not for the back-of-the-ballot problem, which undoubtedly explained many of the 12,000 under votes – ballots that did not include any vote on The Trust.

But no matter. It was an impressive, sweeping, satisfying triumph. Lawrence and his forces lost in only one of Miami-Dade’s 764 precincts. Did Lawrence look into that? Of course.

“I know it’s North Palm Baptist Church,” he said. “I know it’s in extreme northwestern Miami-Dade County. I know there are 70 registered voters. I know that we were outvoted 6-2. So I know exactly what happened in that district. If it had a tiny bit more im-

portance, I would do more work in that area.”

Ana Sejeck: “That one precinct will haunt Dave for the rest of his life.”

That’s probably true, but it’s a small price to pay, and Lawrence knew it then and he knows it now.

“This is an extraordinary evening in all of our lives,” he told a crowd of supporters during his victory speech that night. “Voters, in overwhelming numbers from every corner of our community, have given a great gift to the children of this generation and generations to come. . . .

“Let us not be defined only by the boundaries of our own community. Right now, leaders in other Florida counties, among them Monroe and Volusia and Collier, are contemplating establishing their own Children’s Trusts. This very day, we gave them a signal that, even in tough economic times, this can be done.”

Now, with the passage of a bit of time, those feelings have only deepened. There is simply no reason, Lawrence and his teammates say, why committed people in other communities across the nation cannot duplicate this achievement.

Bendixen:

"This may be the new issue of American politics. It may be that in the 21st century, we're able to build political coalitions based on support for programs that help children and families. We may not all agree on our foreign policy, we may not all agree on economic policy, we may not all agree on the environment or even immigration, but I think when it comes to doing everything that we can to help children and families, there is a very strong consensus in the country and one that generates a lot of energy among regular people.

"Hopefully, campaigns like the one that we ran in Miami – the percentage of people who voted for it, which raised some eyebrows – will put children's issues on the front stage of American politics."

Sejeck:

"To see other communities coming to us and saying, if you could do it in Miami, you could do it anywhere. That's the biggest testament to the work."

Lawrence:

"I hear now from all sorts of people in the children's community. I think people really do want to believe that good things can happen and be inspired. And amidst everything else, isn't it reaffirming about human beings and human nature that 85 plus percent of the people voted for a tax in a tough economic time?"

"This is what I have lived my whole life for, with a sense that if you do good things and tell people as close to the truth as you can get and are willing to be fair, they're willing to do things." ■

Martin Merzer, formerly The Miami Herald's senior writer, recently retired after a 35-year career at the newspaper and at The Associated Press.



Appendix I

Portland, Oregon

A strong leader, a modest tax, another victory for children

The timing was identical, the objectives very similar, the play-book interestingly – and coincidentally – familiar.

In 2002, as The Children’s Trust of Miami-Dade County was planning and winning its enabling ballot initiative in the nation’s southeast corner, supporters of the Portland Children’s Investment Fund were planning and winning their first ballot initiative in the nation’s northwest corner.

Moreover, both groups were required to repeat the feat in 2008, and both succeeded, again employing similar tactics, this time to counteract economic turbulence and deepening anti-tax sentiment.

The experiences and lessons shared by children’s advocates in Portland tend to verify and amplify those absorbed by children’s advocates in the Miami area. Thus, they serve as additional guidance for anyone aiming to replicate these accomplishments.

“We were looking at the state and federal governments always jerking us around when it came to how much funding was available for children, so we began asking, ‘How about the notion of more local control over funding?’” said Dan Saltzman, a Portland city commissioner who championed the fund and made its creation a centerpiece of his re-election campaign in 2002.

“And we decided to ask our own voters if they were willing to tax themselves more.”

The answer was yes, but before we dive into details, a quick summary of similarities and differences between the two enterprises might prove helpful.

By Martin Merzer

Tips From Oregon

- Survey the community to assess needs
- Seek allies in the business community, the media and elsewhere
- Raise sufficient funds and plot a multi-pronged, professionally run campaign
- Test ballot language with voters
- Develop a memorable brand name
- Build transparency and accountability into the program
- Promote benefits to all voters

Similarities:

- Strong leaders with high public visibility and unquestioned credibility: Saltzman in Portland, David Lawrence Jr. in Miami-Dade County.
- Modest, seemingly insignificant levies: about 40 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value in Portland, 50 cents per \$1,000 in Miami-Dade – promoted in both places as equaling about \$60 per year for a typical homeowner.
- A full range of programs that concentrate on early childhood health and education, after-school and mentoring activities, child abuse/youth violence prevention and intervention.
- Authorization campaigns run with the same mind-set and precision employed in successful electoral campaigns, including effective fund-raising and marketing efforts and development of wide community support.
- Vigorous oversight of funding decisions, combined with exacting quality controls and evaluation standards.

Differences:

- Portland's program concentrates on disadvantaged children; Miami-Dade's strives to reach all children, while focusing more dollars on at-risk children.
- Portland's tax generates about \$14 million a year to help support 66 programs that serve 16,000 children; Miami-Dade's generates about \$100 million a year for nearly 300 programs that serve hundreds of thousands of children.
- Portland's fund helps support already proven programs; Miami-Dade's fund can and sometimes does support newly created programs.
- Portland's program is funded and managed by a branch of city government, and the city council and county commission retain some degree of oversight; Miami-Dade's program is run by an "independent special taxing district," separate from the county or any city and divorced from the oversight of those governments.
- Under state law, voters must reauthorize the Portland Children's Investment Fund every five

years – they did so in November 2008 and will vote again in 2013; The Children's Trust faced its only five-year sunset vote in August 2008, successfully winning reauthorization and achieving permanence in the community. "That's nice – they're home free," Saltzman said. "Why didn't we think of that?"

As in Miami-Dade, the campaign to improve the lives of children in Portland was grounded in growing awareness of a profound need. It was nurtured by diverse elements of the community. And it was relentlessly advocated by an impassioned individual – Saltzman, assisted by equally committed partners. "It's been manifestly clear for a very long time that we don't give kids the tools they need to thrive, particularly as the world has been changing," said Jeff Cogen, Saltzman's former chief of staff who now serves as a commissioner of Multnomah County, which encompasses Portland. "It's crazy – we know in the long term, not only is it good for the kids, it saves us money. I just found it incredibly frustrating that we weren't doing much about that."

So, as the 2002 election approached. Saltzman and Cogen gave it a try.

They decided to leverage two serendipitous events: In 2001, a local crime commission – aligned with the Chamber of Commerce – issued a report concluding that the best way to reduce crime was to invest in kids so they don't get into trouble to begin with, and local newspaper columnist David Sarasohn wrote a piece urging local leaders to emulate an early childhood program underway in San Francisco.

That tilled ground already rich in nutrients for the planting of progressive programs. Without doubt, Portland offered Saltzman, Cogen and their supporters advantages not enjoyed by children's advocates in Miami-Dade or some other places.

Most notable among those advantages: Residents of Oregon in general and Portland in particular tend to be progressive thinkers, more willing than most to consider innovative solutions to vexing challenges.

Oregon, for instance, is the only state to require that all elections be conducted by mail (though voters can return ballots to county drop sites). The result: perpetually high turnout and, thus far, no sweeping electoral scandals.

In addition, residents are particularly sensitive to the environment, relatively well-mannered (jaywalking is so rare in Portland that it appears to be a capital crime), and generous when called upon to support charitable endeavors.

Cogen, who was raised in the Miami area, calls Portland “the little blue bubble that we have here.”

“People here are very nice, they’re very polite, they’re very orderly,” he said. “There’s a general sense that collectively we still have the capacity to address our problems. Having been brought up in Florida and living in California before I came here, I know that’s not necessarily the broad sense in those places.”

Saltzman and Cogen were determined to create the Portland Children’s Investment Fund as a branch of city government, one of the key factors that differentiate it from The Children’s Trust in Miami-Dade. Call it a demonstration project.

“To me, it’s important that it be government’s job,” Cogen said. “A big piece of what it’s about is helping kids, giving resources to kids.

“But to me, it’s also about creating a model that helps show government how to operate in an efficient and innovative way, but also shows the community that government is well positioned to deal with these huge challenges that we face.”

Reminded that many governments elsewhere exhibit little interest in children’s programs, Cogen said: “Well, that’s too bad.”

But opposition still had to be confronted in Portland – not in the general public, but within the local political community.

Rather than deal with the complexities of getting a referendum on the ballot, Saltzman and Cogen availed themselves of another option – asking the five-member city council (the mayor and four commissioners) to refer the measure to the electorate. They needed three solid votes. It was a tough fight.

“Though every politician you will ever meet tells you that kids are their highest priority, and though the mayor said kids were her highest priority, the mayor did not want it to go to the ballot and another commissioner didn’t want it to go to the ballot,” Cogen said. “Not because they didn’t like kids – ‘the timing wasn’t right’ and they had other priorities, other agendas.”

Saltzman and Cogen ultimately prevailed, in part by rallying support from the Chamber of Commerce and other elements of the business community and from children’s rights organizations.

“Kids don’t advocate for themselves,” Cogen said. “What we were able to bring to the table that hadn’t been there before was organized, active adult lobbying on behalf of kids.”

Now came the electoral campaign for what became known as the Portland’s Children’s Levy. To Saltzman, the approach was clear. As in Miami-Dade, supporters would launch a full-bore political campaign on behalf

of kids – complete with an accomplished strategist, an aggressive fund-raising effort, a strategic marketing plan.

“That is essential,” Saltzman said. “We were sophisticated about it from the start. This is a campaign, especially the first time around. You have a lot more of people’s inherent skepticism to overcome. I believe if you’re going to do something, you have to do it right.”

It is instructive to note that there was no contact between the forces in Portland and Miami-Dade; each group, acting on its own, developed virtually identical approaches.

In Portland, Saltzman turned to Mark Wiener, a prominent political consultant who has managed elective campaigns for Saltzman and Cogen and many others.

“He’s the brains behind it all,” Saltzman said of Wiener and his political skills.

To a large extent, Wiener (his firm is called “Winning Mark”) is to Portland as political consultant Sergio Bendixen is to Miami-Dade, much as Saltzman is to the Portland Children’s Investment Fund as Lawrence is to The Children’s Trust of Miami-Dade.

“I do a lot of campaigns of all stripes, but the kids’ stuff is closest to my heart,” Wiener said.

As Wiener began working on strategy, Saltzman – seemingly channeling Lawrence – launched himself into the fund-raising universe, making countless calls, sending a stream of e-mails, speaking to community group after community group. For the 2002 campaign, he raised about \$350,000, a significant amount for a city-wide election.

Strategically, supporters found themselves challenged by economic hardship.

“The first time, we were doing this in the middle of a really bad recession, but it was worse for us than in 2008 because we were further along the cycle,” Cogen said. “Unemployment approached 8 percent when we were on the ballot.

“This was a new program, so one of the challenges was, when governments are making massive cuts to existing programs, how do we convince people that a new program is a good idea?”

Another problem: *In Portland, only about 18 percent of all households have a school-age child. “So, you can’t rely just on parents to pass something like this,” Cogen said. “You have to have a broader message that answers, ‘What’s in it for me?’”*

The solution: Focus not only on the kids, but also on the benefits to all voters. Among other things, supporters stressed the long-term financial benefits of helping children now and preventing them from becoming burdens on society later.

“The message at the core was ‘our kids need our help’ and not only does it help them, but it helps you because it saves money,” Cogen said.

“We found there are two groups of people out there – people who cared about kids and people who didn’t give a shit. And people who cared about kids were not necessarily a majority, so in order to get everyone on board, you had to show them that it was a good investment in the community.”

That’s where Wiener came in. He kept the approach and the message simple and focused.

“The basic strategy was to have a well-funded campaign that delivered the message through paid voter contact,” Wiener said.

And his message: “The Children’s Levy is a way that we can make children a higher priority. It funds proven programs in the specific areas of child abuse, early childhood education and helping kids succeed in school while keeping them safe. The levy is also accountable to voters.”

Wiener’s media and outreach strategies were equally focused.

“Our principal medium was direct mail, but we also used a certain amount of broadcast and cable TV,” he said.

“Don’t try to pass one of these things on the cheap,” Wiener advises. “To have a reasonable expectation of success, you must have an adequately-funded campaign that includes polling and probably focus groups, paid voter contact that includes at least five pieces of targeted direct mail and probably some electronic media – TV and-or radio – and a field campaign that activates the various child advocacy and provider groups that either care about it or stand to receive funding from the measure.”

He also recalled another challenge related to the media, one that others will confront in the future: skeptical editorial environments.

“The editorial boards were sympathetic to helping children, but were very concerned that this was a considerable reach beyond the mission of city government,” Wiener said. “We worked very hard with the most important editorial board, The Oregonian, and turned what would have likely been a ‘No’ recommendation into a very compelling endorsement.”

Two important facets of the plan that particularly appealed to editorial writers and voters:

- A 5 percent cap on the fund’s administrative expenses. “That was very much about assuring people that these were dollars that would go to helping kids rather than hiring bureaucrats,” Cogen said.

- A vow that money would not go to unproven or otherwise experimental programs. (Portland’s affection for progressive solutions apparently was not unlimited.)

“People want an investment program that works,” Saltzman said. “There are lots of places that can fund pilot programs or demonstration projects, but that’s not what we’re about.”

The vote on what was called Measure 26-33 was set for November 2002. (The text of the measure, along with explanatory information that was available to voters, can be found at the end of this report.)

It was a squeaker: The initiative was approved by a 51.5 to 48.5 margin.

Now, as in Miami-Dade, the clock began ticking. Proponents knew they had to earn re-approval in five years or so. That meant demonstrating that the money was being used properly and productively.

By city ordinance, an Allocation Committee was created to distribute the funds. It decided to devote about 40 percent to early childhood health and education, 40 percent to mentoring and other after-school programs, and 20 percent to child abuse prevention and intervention. (That currently is being changed to 33 percent for early childhood, 20 percent for after-school, 20 percent for child-abuse prevention, 13.5 percent for mentoring, and 13.5 percent for foster care.)

Funding recommendations must be approved by the Allocation Committee, which is chaired by Saltzman and includes representatives of the city, the county and the business community. They also must be approved by the city council and county commission, though that is largely a rubber-stamp process.

Working swiftly but carefully, the fund’s small staff – then consisting of one full-time employee and three part-timers – vetted and recommended programs. Now, five years later, those programs offer a wide range of services in many ways similar to those funded in Miami-Dade, though on a smaller scale.

The objectives are simple: To assure that children arrive at school ready to learn, provide safe and constructive after-school alternatives for kids, and to prevent child abuse, neglect and family violence.

Take, for instance, the after-school program at Portland’s Humboldt Elementary, a place that serves a community so economically depressed that 96 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

On one afternoon in late 2008, several students could be found enjoying a program run by the Ethos Music Center and supported by the Portland

Children's Investment Fund. The Ethos program was established in 1998 in response to budget cuts that curtailed music education in the city's public schools.

In one room, guitar teacher Graham Nystrom was working with two young students, Bradford and Brenda. They practiced note-writing and elemental guitar playing. They took turns programming an electronic percussion machine. They recorded several songs, including one they had written.

*Here, at Humboldt School, we are real smart,
we are not fools.
Here, at Humboldt School, I've got good grades
and friends, too.
Here, at Humboldt School, we are so cool,
we're really cool.
Here at Humboldt School, we got good rhythm
and rhyme, too.*

"This is my dream job," said Amy Vanacore, Ethos' outreach director. "Without these programs, a lot of these kids would completely lose the capacity to learn about music."

Socially, the programs are of obvious value, but they can exist below many radar screens. From the standpoint of cultivating ongoing support, that value must be demonstrated on a regular basis.

Toward that end, the fund's staff – now consisting of only four part-timers – produced explanatory and promotional mailers that were distributed every other year to all Portland households. In alternate years, the fund took out ads in local newspapers.

"The basic message was, 'Hey, remember us,'" said Mary Gay Broderick, a former newspaper reporter who serves as the fund's part-time communications and outreach director.

And so, as the 2008 reauthorization vote drew near, Saltzman, Cogen, Wiener, Broderick and others began planning their strategy.

"This time, we had five years of experience under our belt and we wanted to highlight the 66 programs we have out there," Saltzman said.

He also was aided by wider support in the social-welfare community – namely managers and employees of those 66 programs that partly depended on the fund and were not shy about lobbying voters on behalf of it.

Despite all of that, as is often the case in politics, a modest initial campaign inevitably morphed into a more expansive re-election/renewal campaign.

Saltzman raised about \$600,000 this time, nearly double the 2002 figure. That fund-raising prowess inspired a local weekly newspaper, the Portland Tribune, to dub Saltzman, "The Big Daddy Warbucks of City Hall."

Once again, Wiener handled top-line strategy, though he hired campaign manager Emerald Bogue to run the day-to-day operation. A fast-talking, hard-working, extraordinarily sharp 28-year-old, Bogue had not previously run an electoral campaign but she was a veteran union organizer.

She and Wiener crafted a carefully targeted, multi-phased campaign that built on the 2002 effort, though with an adjusted focus and with enhanced reliance on data-crunching, grassroots organization and the Internet.

"We found that if people understood what the levy did, they supported it," Bogue said. "So we had to make sure they understood it."

Saltzman, a hands-on type of guy ("He's obsessed," Bogue said, "but I've never seen anyone work harder") kept in close touch with the campaign but turned much of it over to Wiener and Bogue.

"You need to have certifiably smart campaign people," Saltzman said. "Get a good strategist. Get a good campaign manager. And do it in an informed manner starting with a baseline poll. And you have to raise money and that is something people are loathe to do."

The initial poll was designed to help strategists achieve three goals: define the message, determine the degree of difficulty of winning re-approval, and determine whom to target. It found that the tax polled well – 59 percent seemed to support it – but when you subtracted the 5 percent margin of error, that left things a little too close for comfort.

"We would like to sound a note of caution here," the pollsters, Lisa Grove and Ben Patinkin of Grover Insight, wrote in a Feb. 11, 2008, briefing document. "While we start in what seems to be a good position with the electorate, we may be fighting a current this year that we have little control over. Other recent polling conducted in Multnomah County, the state and the region has detected a real concern about rising household costs and the economy."

Bottom line: More support had to be generated.

"We decided we didn't need to target Democrats [because they already tended to support the levy] and we weren't going to bother with Republicans," Bogue said. "So we had to target the unaffiliated."

One concern that surfaced during the "baseline" poll will be familiar to counterparts in Miami-Dade: Despite previous outreach efforts, few voters could identify the Portland Children's Investment Fund or describe what it did.

“Branding is key, and it turned out that hundreds of thousands of people didn’t know who the hell we were,” Broderick said.

The campaign would have to repeatedly contact voters and remind them about the fund’s existence and value. Before long, references to the Portland Children’s Investment Fund – a mouthful – fell away, replaced by references to the Portland Children’s Levy, which is the name of the tax and is more widely recognized.

Broderick and others in the group knew of no organized opposition in 2008, but the ballot was going to be crowded with other initiatives, which was one problem, and – once again – the economy was tanking, which was another.

Broderick recalled working a phone bank one Sunday evening a few weeks before the election and growing alarmed. “It was a bit depressing to hear folks say they can’t afford \$5 a month,” she said. “The economy was our opposition.”

Given the branding issue, the crowded ballot and the bleak economy, supporters of what became known as Measure 26-94 organized a multi-faceted campaign to win re-approval of the levy and the fund. (The text of the measure, along with explanatory information that was available to voters, can be found at the end of this report.)

The first time, in 2002, the core strategy was to illustrate the sheer necessity of the levy and the programs it would fund. Bogue: “This is something that matters, and we want you to vote for it.”

Now, more than five years later, the core strategy was adjusted. Bogue: “The need is still evident, but look at our track record. If you vote ‘No,’ we’ll lose all of this.”

Said Wiener: “The core approach for the 2008 campaign wasn’t very different than the first one. The main difference was that we had a very successful track record to reference, along with good stories to tell.”

And so, the overarching slogan: “Vote Yes for Portland’s Children.”

They bought television spots, billboards, bus bench ads, and four or five massive mailings, including one that focused on the plight of children during economic downturns. Its headline: “Tough times are toughest on them.”

Interestingly, polling revealed that, despite the deteriorating economy, many voters did not favor a lower tax. They liked things pretty much as they were. The result: “We put the word ‘renew’ in every ad, every mailing, everything we could think of,” Bogue said.

They launched neighborhood canvassing, telephone and speaker-circuit efforts. They gathered endorsements from nearly 200 local companies and

organizations and hundreds of local residents.

And they concentrated a great deal of effort on the Internet, building MySpace and Facebook pages and buying fewer newspaper ads and additional ads on blogs and other web pages. “No one reads newspapers anymore,” Bogue said.

She and her two-member part-time staff also created a dedicated campaign website that told the fund’s story and central theme – Because Portland Cares About Kids – in clear, affirmative language. You can examine it here: www.childrenslevy.com

Enlisting student volunteers and taking out some ads in college newspapers, they concentrated a great deal of effort on younger voters, knowing that many would turn out for the Obama-McCain presidential race. In addition, younger voters were less likely to be property owners, thus more likely to vote for a property tax.

Raising the consciousness of young, first-time voters was crucial for another reason: As luck would have it, the levy issue was positioned at the very end of a long ballot, and supporters would have to go hunting for it. (This was another point of connection between Portland and Miami-Dade, where that 2008 ballot question was the only issue to be positioned on the flip side of paper ballots.)

And Bogue, a self-admitted data-collecting machine who now carries a five-inch thick loose-leaf book filled with campaign-related data bases and planning documents (a template for similar campaigns elsewhere), tried a grab bag of innovative techniques.

Among them:

- Yard-sign canvassing – setting loose scores of volunteers assigned to sweet talk homeowners into planting campaign yard signs on their properties. “We gave them street names and said, ‘Godspeed to you,’” Bogue said.
- Persuading directors of levy-funded programs and other supporters to send get-out-the-vote e-mails to their entire address books. Health care provider Kaiser Permanente, alone, passed the word to 8,000 local residents.
- Never missing an opportunity. The campaign even paid for and included its logo on a newspaper ad that featured Saltzman’s annual holiday greeting to Jewish voters. The ad’s headline: “Happy Rosh Hashanah.” The ad’s tagline: “Vote Yes for Portland’s Children.”

- Asking one children's program, which encourages kids to read, to distribute thousands of campaign-themed bookmarks. "That cost us exactly \$60 at Kinko's," Bogue said.

All of that contributed, but in the end, what mattered most was the fund's sheer good work and – crucially – its credibility and squeaky clean image.

"Like the diligent student at the back of the class, it's not showy or flashy," The Oregonian, the area's major paper, wrote in an editorial that endorsed re-approval. "No drama. No wisecracks. It just keeps doing the work and doing it well..."

"If you could meet every child served by the children's levy – roughly 16,000 kids each year – the vote on renewing it would be easy. The Children's Investment Fund would have you at 'hello!'"

And it did. Measure 26-94 passed by an overwhelming 72 percent to 28 percent margin. The fund will survive for at least another five years. Its good work will continue.

"I think Portland voters have proven that, although these are tough times and concerns about jobs and mortgage payments are on people's minds, they recognize a good long-term investment in the city's kids," Saltzman told The Oregonian on Election Night.

Asked a month later about his advice for other communities, Saltzman said:

"If you want to tackle some of the most pressing issues, child-development and child-abuse issues, if you want to do that locally, you have to figure out a way to fund them locally."

Said Bogue: "If you organize this right, you can spread it anywhere. This is something that can totally be duplicated elsewhere."

Text of Measure 26-33 – Portland, Oregon, General Election of November 2002

CAPTION: Five-year levy for Children's Investment Fund.

QUESTION: Shall Portland support early childhood, after-school, child abuse programs; five-year levy \$0.4026 per \$1,000 assessed value beginning in 2003? This measure may cause property taxes to increase more than three percent.

Explanatory information:

Measure would finance Portland Children's Investment Fund to support proven programs designed to help children arrive at school ready to learn, provide safe

and constructive after school alternatives for kids, and prevent child abuse and neglect and family violence.

This Children's Investment Fund can only be used for:

Child abuse prevention and intervention, which addresses juvenile crime, school failure, drug and alcohol abuse and homeless youth.

Early childhood programs which make child care more affordable and prepare children for success in school.

After-school and mentoring programs that promote academic achievement, reduce the number of juveniles victimized by crime and increase graduation rates.

Accountability measures include:

Programs must be cost effective and have a proven record of success.

Investment fund will be subject to annual audits.

Administrative costs cannot exceed 5%.

Levy produces an estimated \$50 million over 5 years, averaging \$10 million per year. Levy is \$0.4026 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. A home valued at \$150,000 pays \$5.03 per month, \$60.39 per year.

Text of Measure 26-94 – Portland, Oregon, General Election of November 2008

CAPTION: Renew five-year levy for Children's Investment Fund

QUESTION: Shall Portland continue supporting child abuse prevention, foster children, early childhood, after-school programs, renewing five-year levy starting 2009?

This Measure may cause property taxes to increase by more than three percent.

Explanatory information:

Measure would continue financing the Children's Investment Fund to support proven programs designed to help children arrive at school ready to learn, provide safe and constructive after-school alternatives for kids, help foster children and prevent child abuse and neglect and family violence.

This Children's Investment Fund can only be used for:

Child abuse prevention and intervention:

addressing juvenile crime, school failure, drug and alcohol abuse and homeless youth.

Early childhood programs: making child care more affordable and preparing children for success in school.

- **After-school, summer and mentoring programs** : promoting academic achievement, reducing the number of juveniles victimized by crime and increasing graduation rates.
- **Children in foster care programs:** helping foster children succeed who have been abused and neglected.

Accountability measures include:

- Programs funded must be cost effective and have a proven record of success.
- Investment fund subject to oversight by a citizen committee.
- Investment fund subject to annual audits.
- Administrative costs cannot exceed 5%.

Levy is \$0.4026 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, and produces an estimated \$14 million per year for 5 years. ■



Appendix II

Seattle, Washington

One instructive triumph for children, one instructive defeat

This is a tale of one city and two initiatives on behalf of children.

The first effort was spearheaded by an energetic, charismatic local figure who made children's welfare the centerpiece of his mayoral candidacy. The proposal was clear. Its cost was modest and widely dispersed. Its campaign was carefully planned and strategically executed.

Known as the Family and Education Levy, it was passed by 57 percent of the voters in 1990, renewed by 65 percent of the voters in 1997, and renewed again by 62 percent of the voters in 2004. It now funnels about \$16.6 million a year into programs intended to ensure that children are ready to learn, perform to state testing standards, and graduate from high school.

"Without the levy, we would have seen a faster downward spiral in our educational system, leaving the children of this community in peril," said Norman B. Rice, who made Seattle's struggling public education system the focus of a 1989 electoral campaign that he ultimately won, becoming the city's first – and thus far only – black mayor.

The other initiative was sponsored in 2003 by a non-profit institute with a relatively low profile. Its purpose – to provide pre-kindergarten programs for low-income families and improve wages for child care workers – seemed noble but redundant, given the long-approved Family and Education Levy. Its cost also was modest, nearly inconsequential, but fell on one segment of the population, a segment served by powerful local business interests. Its campaign was outmaneuvered, underfunded and poorly timed.

By Martin Merzer

Tips From Seattle

- Involve the business community
- Sharply focus your goals
- Involve unions, if present
- Include accountability standards
- Control the media message

Known formally as Initiative 77 or the Early Learning and Care Campaign, the proposal soon was dubbed the “latte tax.”

The reason: It would add 10 cents to every espresso drink. Lattes, cappuccinos, Americanos, macchiatos. Hot or cold. In Seattle, the corporate base of Starbucks and ancestral home of the nation’s ever-growing fixation on all things coffee.

Widely mocked, the latte tax was ground into fine powder, rejected by 68 percent of the voters in September 2003.

“As soon as the frame shifted from early learning to ‘this silly latte tax,’ we were done,” said John Burbank, executive director of the Economic Opportunity Institute, which sponsored the latte tax.

Often, more can be learned from defeats than from triumphs, but before we examine the campaign for the latte tax, a brief look at the Family and Education Levy is in order – for lessons also can be found there.

The levy was conceived, developed, approved and implemented through a pattern of events that now is becoming familiar to us: A determined local leader, concerned about the welfare of the area’s children and the condition of the public education system, organized a group of like-minded citizens, conducted community meetings and voter surveys, and launched a carefully planned ballot initiative that won wide public support.

In this case, that leader was Rice, a prominent local figure with a varied background that provided access to many elements of the community. Before becoming mayor, he had served as a television and radio reporter, in executive positions at the Urban League, other community groups and a local bank, and as a city councilman.

Soon after his election in 1989, Rice sponsored an Education Summit that attracted more than 800 participants and drew attention to the needs of the area’s children and to a public school system that was being bled of resources and left desperate for financial support. Participants recommended a special emphasis on services that ensured children and youth are safe, healthy and ready to learn.

A subsequent survey detected voter support for a modest property tax increase. A group called Families First was formed to launch a 1990 campaign on behalf of what became known as the Families and Education Levy.

That group raised only about \$200,000 for direct marketing and advertising efforts, but the campaign benefited from Rice’s popularity and from the intense support of his office, other city departments and much of the business community.

It also benefited from the nature of Seattle’s citizens.

To some extent like those in Portland, Seattle residents tend to support initiatives they understand to be worthy. In 2008 alone, they agreed to tax themselves through special levies for transportation, city parks, and redevelopment of the Pike Place market and tourism area.

“We are civic-minded and liberal,” said Bea Kelleigh, director of the city’s Early Learning and Family Support Division. “Seattle’s a different place. We have a very engaged population here.”

No major opposition formed, and the education initiative won easy approval, raising \$69.2 million over the next seven years.

This is particularly notable, given that Seattle’s youth population is relatively small. Only about 17 percent of the population is under 18, compared to about 25 percent nationally, according to Gerard “Sid” Sidorowicz, acting director of the city’s Office for Education.

“Yet, people recognize the value of this investment,” Sidorowicz said.

Programs and services funded by the levy include early childhood development, school-based student and family services, comprehensive student health services, and after-school/out-of-school activities. These efforts serve all children, though special emphasis is placed on reducing the achievement gap suffered by disadvantaged kids.

The levy must be re-approved every seven years and has been, despite limited opposition that arose in 2004, sparked by a near doubling of the millage rate to .39 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. Now, the levy is projected to raise about \$116 million between 2005 and 2012 or about \$16.6 million per year.

In contrast to The Children’s Trust in Florida’s Miami-Dade County, which administers about \$100 million of tax money every year with little official scrutiny (and, thus far, without a single blemish on its record), Seattle’s levy is tightly linked to the city and to the public school system.





The program is overseen by the city's Department of Neighborhoods, a unit of the Seattle's Office for Education. In addition, a Levy Oversight Committee – a seven-member panel of elected officials, citizens and school district officers – directs the use of levy funds, setting desired outcomes and accountability standards.

Another contrast: Programs sponsored by The Children's Trust are entirely separate from public school programs. In Seattle, some funds support existing city and school-based programs, though a portion of the levy is used to launch and support new programs and services. The original idea was to free the school board's funds for other educational purposes, but it often didn't work out that way. Rather than augment school board funding, the levy's proceeds sometimes merely replace money diverted elsewhere.

This is a particular point of contention for Burbank, organizer of the latte tax, and for others with a somewhat sour view of government efforts and the Seattle business community's motives.

"The Families and Education Levy is a prime example of building a bureaucracy and not solving a problem," Burbank said. "It's not systemic at all. It's just sort of continuing a funding basis for what is essentially Seattle city services.

"The levy is not an early learning initiative. The mayor may want to make it look like it is, but it ain't."

Still, supporters say, the Families and Education Levy and the programs it supports are doing good work, have won plaudits from early-education experts and are embraced locally with great pride.

"What the levy was meant to do, first and paramount, was generate a renewed interest in this city and its citizens in education, reminding them that they have a role to play," said Rice, who later served as president of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Seattle and now is the distinguished practitioner-in-residence at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Affairs.

How popular is the levy and its programs? During the 2004 renewal effort, supporters placed virtually no media advertising or spent much money on other standard campaign tactics. For the most part, they simply enlisted the support of newspaper editorial boards and other opinion leaders.

"The early polling showed we had very broad support, so we took kind of a back seat," Sidorowicz said. "We said, 'As long as things are working well, there's no need to put on a strong effort.'"

Alas, Burbanks and a few other early-education advocates believed that the city should do more, and thus was born the proposed latte tax.

The tax was conceived in 2002 by Burbank and his Economic Opportunity Institute as a way to provide additional funds specifically for early-childhood projects: pre-school programs, improved training and wages for child-care workers, and subsidies so low-income families could afford child care.

"A lot of people in the child care community really don't understand that if you talk about child care quality, you have to talk about child care teachers and child care providers, and so you have to talk about compensation and professionalism," said Burbank, whose institute is largely supported by labor unions. "If you avoid that conversation, you will not be able to obtain any kind of high-quality early childhood education.

The idea seemed worthy, early polling seemed promising, and the issue was set for a vote in September 2003, but the proposal soon ran into major problems, some of the institute's own making. Many of the strategies and techniques that marked successful campaigns for children elsewhere were missing or violated this time around:

- To many voters in Seattle, the proposal seemed redundant and unnecessary. They already had approved the Families and Education Levy on behalf of kids, and supporters of the latte tax had trouble distinguishing their purpose from the levy's purpose.

"I never was a latte tax person," said Rice, the former mayor. "It just wasn't well thought out. I can't even remember what it was supposed to pay for."

- Support that was expected from affected parties such as groups of child care workers did not materialize.

"We just didn't have the horses," Burbank said. "I thought that if we had an initiative like this, it would catalyze the child care workers to mobilize, and that didn't happen.

"The workers don't see themselves as political actors. They're passive and depressed in some ways. They get paid shitty wages and they didn't have much of an organization to move them along."

- The tax itself seemed a little...loopy.

It would have added 10 cents to virtually all hot and cold espresso-type drinks sold in the city. (For the uninitiated, espresso is a concentrated coffee beverage brewed by forcing very hot water under high pressure through coffee that has been ground to a powder-like consistency – rather than dripping hot water through ground coffee beans. Espresso is the key component of lattes, cappuccinos and most of those other fancy drinks sold by Starbucks and similar outlets.)

National and a few international media outlets carried somewhat arch reports about the proposal and comedians had a field day, poking fun at those wacky, liberal coffee lovers of the Pacific Northwest.

- Clarity was not achieved on an element as basic as how much the tax would raise. Supporters claimed \$7 million to \$10 million a year; opponents estimated no more than \$1.5 million a year; an analysis sponsored by the City Council came up with \$3 million a year, maybe. It all depended on a wide range of variables concern-

ing per-capita consumption of the drinks that would be taxed.

To see coverage of the latte tax by The Daily Show with comedian Jon Stewart, go to this link:
<http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoid=112379&title=Too-Little-Too-Latte>

- Coffee beans, drip coffee and any business with less than \$50,000 in annual sales would have been exempt from the tax, but opposition immediately mushroomed throughout the business community.

Starbucks, the Washington Restaurant Association, the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce and more than 125 others formed a group calling itself JOLT (Joined to Oppose the Latte Tax) to campaign against the proposal.



They said the tax was unfair (affecting only one portion of the community – high-end coffee drinkers) and would be difficult to administer, with many coffee outlets, including restaurants, department stores and even hospitals, having no way to easily distinguish revenue from espresso-based products.

- These opponents had plenty of time to mount their attack. In Miami-Dade, David Lawrence Jr. and other leaders of The Children's Trust kept their campaign efforts low-key and under the radar until just a few months before the vote and at a time that seemed strategically right – a policy crafted to keep opposition from forming too quickly and solidly.

In Seattle, it didn't happen that way. Burbank concedes that he was outmaneuvered by city officials and the business community, with the vote getting delayed from November 2002 until September 2003. Prominent stories about Burbank's latte tax appeared in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer as early as July 2002, giving opposition more than a year to coalesce.

"You can say they stumbled right at the gate," Sidorowicz said. "They were open for ridicule right away. And the lack of clarity about what the levy would do really hurt them."

Kelleigh: "The business community was strong against it. I thought it was a nonstarter. You can't get things done in Washington state without the business community.

As the September 2003 election approached, the depth of that opposition overwhelmed Burbank, his small band of supporters and his anemic resources.

"The issue was pretty much dead," Burbank said.

Still, his institute, also supported by foundations and private donors, contributed \$51,000 to the Early Learning and Care Campaign, which raised a total of only \$144,811. JOLT spent \$172,007 fighting the proposal, according to filings at the city's Ethics and Elections Commission.

But the campaign was, at best, half-hearted. No television, radio or newspaper advertising. No community organizing, in the modern sense. No campaign manager.

"Maybe we did one or two pieces of mail, but it was pretty pathetic," Burbank said.

Opponents, on the other hand, planted lawn signs saying "No I-77 Espresso Tax" and organized media-savvy performance-art events, including one in which be-wigged protestors tossed symbolic bags of "coffee" (actually balloons) into the harbor.

Heaving aroused well-financed and powerful opponents, unable to make a clear case for the proposal's need, Burbank's latte tax lost by greater than a 2-1 margin.

Burbank is a little bitter – but also candid and helpful – as he reviews the painful episode.

About his fellow residents: "Seattleites like to think of themselves as liberals. They would have voted on a tax for cigarettes – no problem. But you touch their \$3 espresso drinks and, 'My God, a 10-cent tax!' The fact is, it was an act of selfishness on their part."

About the local business community: "When push comes to shove, the business community is interested in philanthropic stuff that makes them look good, but not systemic programs that create the foundation for high-quality early learning. They are not interested in some components of social democracy, such as early learning. Anything that disrupts or challenges current relationships of power is something they're not going to be happy about."

About the current state of affairs: "The real problem is that this is a public good that is not funded publicly. I don't know how you make that change. We're taken some strides in the last 10 years in terms of public consciousness, but frankly, there is no dedicated funding source for early learning, which is what this would have been. And frankly, I think a lot of it [the Family and Education Levy] is show. It's not really boots-on-the-ground, actual funding."

Others differ, and on the more affirmative side, Sidorowicz, Kelleigh and others already are planning their 2011 levy-renewal effort. They expect the campaign to be low-key, driven primarily by data that demonstrates the levy's beneficial effects on Seattle's children.

"We're beginning more evaluations of what we've accomplished," Sidorowicz said. "We're at the point now where I think we're pretty stabilized in the programs we're running. There should just be improvements now." ■



Bet On Your Community's Future

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The Billion-Dollar Bet On A Community's Future

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