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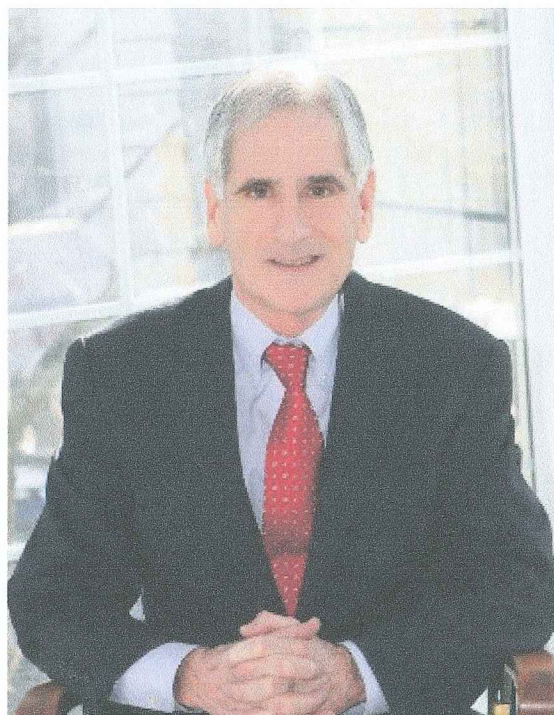
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More than a game

It takes a lot of patience to deal with a stranger berating you about your job performance, but if there's a decent chance that same disgruntled stranger will hand you 20 dollars and offer a pat on the back not long after, it's worth it in Lou Levine's eyes.

Levine is a lawyer by vocation but for the past 25 years his avocation has been officiating local basketball games, and for the last four years Levine has taken the money he's made as a referee and donated it to Officials vs. Cancer, a program that benefits the American Cancer Society.

Levine, the president of International Association of Approved basketball Officials (IAABO) Board 44, which covers the North Central Worcester County Area, has raised a total of \$140,000 since he started his fundraising endeavor.



Levine, a New York City native who stayed in the area after finishing law school at Boston College, goes beyond donating his per-game wages.

During halftime of youth games he works, he'll blow his whistle - which, by the way, is pink year-round in awareness of breast cancer - and approach the bleachers full of parents and fans.

"I'll just walk over and give them my pitch, and let them know what I'm doing," Levine said. "I tell them why I'm raising money. Sometimes I'll have a donated gift card, and I'll sell it for 25 bucks. Inevitably, I'll get more than the gift card is worth and other donations."

Levine estimates he officiates about 200 games per year, which includes youth leagues, men's leagues and area high school games.

During basketball season, Levine often tosses up his first jump ball at 8 a.m. and won't blow the whistle to conclude his last game of the day until 10 p.m.

"Just for example," Levine said, "I might start out Saturday morning at Oakmont (Regional) and do two or three games there then I'll head over for a couple games in Ayer before going to Worcester for some late games."

The support has been at times overwhelming for Levine, who receives donations from coaches, parents and his fellow officials either as a one-time transaction on a per-game officiated basis.

“It’s great to raise the money, but when I have people come up to me and hand me some cash and tell me they’re a cancer survivor and shake my hand and thank me, it’s just a really nice feeling,” he said.

Each year, Levine dedicates his officiating season and his fundraising to colleagues who have passed, including Gerry Flynn, Peter Desy, Paul Cartwright, and Chip Leeds.

“I hope nobody gets cancer,” Levine said. “Unfortunately, I know next year, I’ll have another person to dedicate this to. Cancer is a plague. If your family and friends haven’t been touched by it, you’re blessed. I do this to be an example and help out in some way.”

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