

Resolving violence in productive ways

IIRP's programs enable people to restore and build community.

By DOUGLAS GRAVES
Press writer

Ted Wachtel, president and founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices, has managed the seemingly impossible: he started a new academic institution in the university and college-rich Lehigh Valley.

IIRP, a non-profit organization, is located at 544 Main St., just blocks from Moravian College in historic downtown Bethlehem.

The institute offers two graduate degrees in the emerging social science of restorative practices.

The Master of Restorative Practices and Education degree and the Master of Restorative Practices and Youth Counseling degree are designed to qualify graduates to work effectively in this interesting social science.

Students can also take single courses or earn 12-credit graduate certificates.

The new science "enables people to restore and build community in an increasingly disconnected world," according to IIRP program literature. "Restorative practices offer a common thread to tie together theory, research and practice in seemingly disparate fields, such as education, counseling, criminal justice, social work and organizational management." Over 300 people attended IIRP's 2006 international conference that had some area Bethlehem hotels packed.

Attendees came from over 20 countries including, Costa Rica, Sweden, Taiwan and New Zealand.

Wachtel and the staff at IIRP "share the dream of making the world a place where conflict can be resolved in non-violent, non-punitive, productive ways" Laura Mirsky, communications coordinator at IIRP, said.

Wachtel's vision has been incorporated into public schools in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Maryland and abroad.

His "SaferSanerSchools" restorative practices program provides educators the tools to reduce disciplinary referrals and to create conditions where students learn to take responsibility for their own unacceptable behavior and appreciate the impact it has on others.

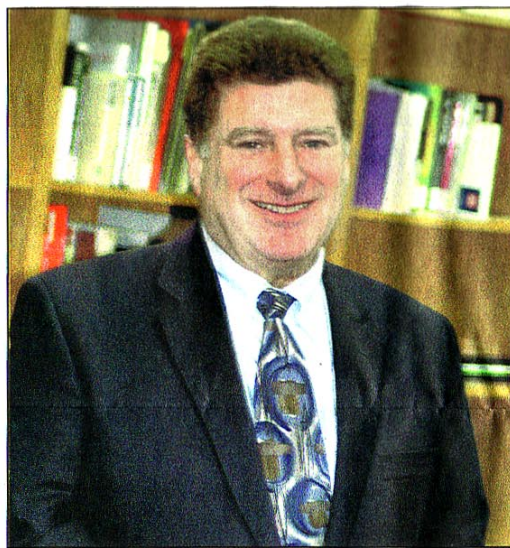
Inappropriate behavior is not tolerated.

"We really hold them accountable," Wachtel said.



PRESS PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS GRAVES

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IIRP founder Ted Wachtel gained international recognition in 1983 when he co-authored "Tough Love," a parental self help manual for kids in trouble.

"Punishment is the normal response to misbehavior.

"Our society's fundamental assumption is that punishment holds offenders accountable.

"However, for an offending student, punishment is a passive experience... the student remains silent, resents the authority figure, feels angry and perceives himself the victim.

"Doing things to an offending student merely alienates him," he said. "We must do things with him. We must engage him in an active way to truly hold him accountable. We want to build positive relationships between the student and those affected by his behavior."

Wachtel and his wife, Susan, at the time also a public school teacher, founded the Community Service Foundation in 1977.

Later, they founded Buxmont Academy where they worked with problematic teens developing self esteem, acceptance of responsibility and an understanding how their actions affect those around them.

The academy's mission is "to provide a safe nurturing environment where students may develop the abilities to deal with academic and behavioral problems and grow into responsible young adults."

Buxmont Academy has eight campuses in southeastern Pennsylvania, including the one at 544 Main St.

Wachtel, 60, an Allen High School alumnus, graduated from Miami University of Ohio and began his teaching career in the Pennridge School District in Bucks County.

Early in his career, he realized that he was unusually successful in dealing with students who seemed to get in trouble.

His wife, Susan Glazier Wachtel, the associate dean for Academic Affairs at IIRP, also has deep local roots. A Liberty High School graduate, her family owned the well known N. Glazier Furniture company once located on Third Street in Bethlehem.

She is also the executive director for Buxmont Academy. Ted Wachtel gained international recognition in 1983 when he co-authored "Tough Love," a parental self help manual for kids in trouble.

He is the author of two other books, "Real Justice" and "The Electronic Congress."

In 1999 he co-authored "The Conferencing Handbook."

To learn more about how this concept is slowly making the world a better place, visit www.iirp.org.

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