

## MICHAEL RYBAK



***Describe how your personal goals, challenges or commitments exemplify or are inspired by Michael Rothberg's legacy.***

Well noted is the extent to which Michael C. Rothberg gave his time and energy to causes he believed in deeply. My dedication to a cause I believe in deeply led me to also give great time and energy. Following my belief that it is important to help others led me to partake in a community service program unlike any other I have ever been part of before. This program differed because, for the first time, I was not just a volunteer; I actually initiated the program and learned first hand why service to the community will always be a crucial part of my life. After my mother's aunt passed away due to Lymphoma, my brother and I decided we wanted to create a program that would help chemotherapy patients through the rigors of their treatments. Thoughts of my aunt's experiences, prompted us to think of a way we could help children stricken with cancer feel good about themselves during their treatments. We came up with the idea of collecting and distributing baseball hats to kids who had lost their hair due to chemotherapy and radiation. So, we created a program called, Lids for Kids. We contacted local companies in the Boston area and asked if they would donate baseball hats for the kids to wear. After collecting the donated hats, we visited pediatric hematology and oncology units in the greater Boston area and had the kids choose their favorite hats. On one visit I spoke to a doctor who thanked me for our efforts and told me that by allowing the

children to choose the hats they wanted, I was giving them the power of choice, something cancer had stolen from them. She explained that although the choice appeared small, the fact that they were allowed to make any choice while undergoing such horrific treatments for such a devastating disease was huge. Throughout all of my previous community service experiences, I had never thought about how empowering the ability to choose really was. I left that day having learned an extremely valuable life lesson. I realized that the volunteer work I do, whether collecting baseball hats for cancer victims or cans of food for the needy, is important on many different levels. And, it may be most important because the people who are being helped by this work are given the strength to look forward to another day and the hope of a good and happy life. I have continued Lids for Kids and have now been distributing hats to local hospitals for over a year.

***How have acts of terrorism around the world affected your life and your outlook on the future?***

Although acts of terrorism throughout the world have not physically affected my life or the life of any of my family members, they have most certainly affected my outlook on the future and the way in which I presently live my life. As of September 11, I felt as though I lived in a world, in a country, in which I was protected and safe. The terrorist attacks that took place on American soil on September 11, as well as those that continue to ravage the world, have stolen that feeling of invincibility from me. They have replaced it with an understanding that the world, including the United States, is vulnerable to attack and subsequent death and destruction at any point in time. However, with the understanding of this, my eyes have been opened as to how I want to live my life now and in the future. I have learned truly how much of a gift life is and that at any moment my life may be changed forever. The sole regret I have is that it took such a catastrophic event for me to come to this realization. As a result of my respect for life I have started giving more to others and using my time and energy to positively influence change. Due to the acts of terrorism around the world I have also realized how much family means to me and that I must live life to the fullest and enjoy the company of my family for as long as possible. The terrorist attacks that continue to take place have infringed on my life as an American citizen. The fact that many people can't walk through a city or fly on an airplane without feeling scared demonstrates this infringement. As a young American citizen I have seen the most gruesome of attacks due to terrorism on the United States and the world. I plan on using my understanding of the current situation to erase the fear that grips so many and help fight those who continue to target innocent lives.