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Section: Local

Post to bring positive message for C.A.R.E. Darien

By Meghan Muldowney

Those who volunteer and give back to others benefit more than just the recipients of their goodwill -- they benefit themselves as well. Stephen Post, Ph.D., author of *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*, will speak at the Wee Burn Country Club, as part of the C.A.R.E. Darien (A Community of Accountability and Respect for Everyone) initiative on Friday, Jan. 30.

Post is currently the director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics in the School of Medicine at Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, N.Y.

His book explores how individuals who do "good things" tend to live longer and happier lives.

"Basically I'm going to look at a lot of the new science on positive emotions and positive behavior," said Post. "People who have generous or altruistic purposes in life, if you look at their lives over the full spectrum from pre-teen to old age, the ones who have the generosity of purpose tend to be less depressed on average and much happier."

Why Good Things Happen to Good People describes 10 different areas where people can give of themselves in their lives, such as loyalty, listening and creativity.

"Researchers have looked at individuals who do volunteer work, even just for a couple hours a week," said Post, who is the president of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, which was founded in 2001. "After that experience, half of them report a high feeling. That's related to endorphins, the body's natural opiates that come out of the brain."

This feeling is commonly referred to as the "helper's high."

Studies have been done that prove parts of people's brains light up when they give to a charity.

"It's the mesolimbic part of the brain, a deeply emotional part of the brain that's associated with happiness, dopamine and serotonin," Post said.

People who help others are less stressed and report greater tranquility in their lives, according to Post.

"They find life more meaningful and are happier," he said.

If people who are happier live longer, it is not surprising that hostility and negative emotions shorten one's life expectancy.

"Some researchers talk about people being able to avoid the stressful emotions like hostility, which we know over the long term is like acid on metal . . . it affects the cardiovascular system and the immune system," he said.

Post will also be the keynote speaker at the Darien High School Volunteer Fair Assembly earlier that day, for high school students only, where he will be giving a presentation about his findings to the students.

"I intend to do a lot of Q-and-A with the students. I'm going to engage [their volunteer] experiences as well," said Post. "I want to challenge them to overcome any of the negative stereotypes that somehow generosity and kindness aren't good for you over the course of a lifetime."

Even when situations seem dire, it is best to keep giving to others in some way.

"There's a connection between giving and hopefulness," he said. "The two of those things often come together. When life is difficult and you're losing hope in the future, one of the best things you can do is reach out and help other human beings."

The luncheon, which is sponsored by **the Community Fund** of Darien, will be held from noon to 2 p.m. Tickets are \$40 each.

Those interested in attending the luncheon can call **the Community Fund** at 655-8775 or e-mail lisa@communityfunddarien.org.

Post's book, which was co-authored with journalist Jill Neimark, is available for purchase at Barrett Bookstore, major retailers and www.whygoodthingshappen.com. He will be signing copies at the luncheon.

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