

Palisadian-Post

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 2016 ♦ PACIFIC PALISADES, CALIFORNIA

\$1.50

Two Palisadians Honored for Addiction Treatment Program

By DAYNA DRUM
Reporter

Addiction can wear many faces and reside in the least likely houses, but Palisadians and longtime friends **Andy Besser** and **Robert Landes** are helping to fight the problem head on.

The two men will be honored at Beit T'Shuvah's 24th annual gala titled "Step Out of the Shadows" on Jan. 24 for their work establishing an intensive outpatient program at Beit T'Shuvah in Los Angeles.

Both Besser and Landes have lived in Pacific Palisades for over 20 years and have had successful careers—Besser as an attorney and Landes as a corporate executive.

As recovering drug and alcohol addicts, the men independently reached a point in their lives where they needed a change. So they turned to helping others.

Besser recognized an addiction problem in the younger population, starting as early as middle school, and decided he had to do something.

"It's easy to write a check, and that's not what I wanted to do. I wanted to get involved on the ground and actively help people," Besser told the *Palisadian-Post*.

Besser entered a program at UCLA and became an addiction counselor. He fulfilled his internship hours at Beit T'Shuvah and has evolved to

a program director in just four years.

In 2008, Landes' wife Wendy was diagnosed with a type of rare cancer. "The day that the last trial drug failed on my wife is the day I decided to change my path," Landes said.

After Wendy died in March 2013, Landes followed Besser's path and became an addiction counselor through the UCLA program and interned at Beit T'Shuvah.

About a year ago, Besser and Landes were approached about forming a structured intensive outpatient program, which had previously not existed at Beit T'Shuvah. To ensure their program wouldn't encumber the inpatient program, they raised \$450,000 from two philanthropists.

Following the standards of their mother organization, 70 percent of the program's patients don't pay anything, while still receiving professional care. Besser and Landes said their program is not religion-based, but it is spiritual-based and rooted in the 12-Step Program.

"We're not here to lecture. We're here to educate and to take away the shame of addiction," Landes said. "The stigma still exists in our minds somehow that this is a choice."

Both men said they frequently encounter people in the Palisades who will whisper to them that they or one of their children have an ad-



(L to r): Palisadians Robert Landes and Andy Besser will be honored at Beit T'Shuvah's 24th annual gala for their work establishing an intensive outpatient program for addiction recovery.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

diction problem.

Besser explained it is a current trend for adolescents to take medication from their parents' or friends' medicine cabinets.

According to statistics used by the Office of National Drug Policy, almost 70 percent of individuals who begin abusing pain relievers obtain them from either a friend or family member. These statistics also indicate there is a drug-induced death in America every 13 minutes.

"It doesn't matter how big your house is or how small your house is. It doesn't matter if you went to Yale or came from jail. The disease of addiction doesn't care, it's an equal opportunity destroyer, and recovery is an equal opportunity restorer," Landes said. The

Beit T'Shuvah name is Hebrew for "House of Return."

The outpatient program is 90 days long and serves a broad range of people. The focus of the program is long-term connection. Data shows that being part of a community is what leads individuals to sobriety, Besser said. The recovering addicts-turned-program-directors want more Palisadians to get involved and to give back to others. Besser pointed out that as an affluent community, its residents are "obligated" to be involved in service.

"It's not Skid Row, it's everywhere. Skid Row is what happens when there aren't resources to help people," Besser said.

To learn more about the intensive outpatient program at Beit T'Shuvah visit iopbts.org.