

**TWOMINUTES**

# HEARTS OF GOLD

Marc Hamroff is working to improve cardiac care

Marc Hamroff, managing partner of Garden City-based law firm Moritt Hock & Hamroff, is chairman of the board of the American Heart Association's Long Island division. He spoke with LIBN after the group's Heart Savers dinner and awards and after the New York State Legislature approved mandatory CPR training as a graduation requirement for high school students.

**How and why did you get involved in cardiac as a cause?** Unfortunately for me, heart disease has been prevalent in my family. I lost my father when he was only 69. He had a heart attack in the gym almost eight years ago. He was less than one mile from Winthrop Hospital. He never made it to the hospital. It made no sense to me that he could have a heart attack at a gym one mile from a major hospital and not have some way or mechanism to be able to survive something like that.

**Have you lost others in your family to heart disease?** My father lost a brother much younger than that. My brother became a cardiologist. My father had heart disease going back to my college days. He had heart disease the better part of his adult life. I'm sure my brother saw that. He went to medical school and chose cardiology to try and make a difference.

**How prevalent is heart disease?** It's the No. 1 killer of men and women in the United States. More people die or suffer disabilities from heart disease than all cancers combined. Most people don't realize that. There have been tremendous strides made.

**What are some of these strides?** Although it's still the No. 1 one cause of death in Americans, death from cardiovascular disease has decreased 70 percent since 1968. Most of that's from scientific innovations, much of which is funded by the American Heart Association. Artificial heart valves, cholesterol drugs, heart transplant techniques. The American Heart Association has hospital guidelines for cardiac care. There was tremendous mortality in the hospital. You would have a heart attack and die in the hospital. The guidelines that the hospitals follow have reduced those mortality rates tremendously.

**Is lifestyle contributing to the problem?** Many say, "If I take my cholesterol pill, maybe I don't need to go to the gym, eat more fruits and vegetables and exercise."

**What do you do in terms of your health?** Running

one of Long Island's largest law firms is pretty stressful. I've learned that eating well and staying fit not only supports a heart-healthy life but it makes me more effective in my career. I exercise and train regularly. I run 15 to 20 miles a week. All the data shows that more than food, medicine and cholesterol medication, exercise is the No. 1 key to reducing cardiac risk factors.

**How has legislation helped?** The biggest announcement we've had in quite some time was on Sept. 17. The New York Board of Regents voted on the long-awaited CPR-in-schools legislation. Now high school students in New York will be required to have hands-on CPR training as a graduation requirement. We've learned that people trained in CPR really save lives. It follows the adoption of another law called Louis's law, named after a young Long Island boy, Louis Acompora, who was playing lacrosse at the age of 14. He was hit in the chest by a lacrosse ball and died on the field because nobody was trained in CPR. There were no AEDs (automated external defibrillators). There was no law requiring an AED on these ball fields throughout Long Island. Louis's law requires AEDs on school ball fields, any public place of recreation, baseball fields, lacrosse, football, hockey. They are pretty foolproof. You open them up. It takes a matter of seconds to follow the instructions.

**Can you tell me about who won some of the Heart Savers awards?** We brought together a number of people from across Long Island who saved adults and children – the savers and the saved. And we gave the American Heart Association Heart Saver awards. One award was given out by a 15-year-old boy struck by a baseball who went into cardiac arrest in the middle of the game. Two people stepped up. One performed CPR. One went and found the AED at the ball field. The child who went into cardiac arrest was there to present the award to the person who administered the CPR and the one who ran and found the AED.



**Who is on the board?** The interesting thing about our board is its split 50/50 between medical professionals in the cardiac space, mostly cardiologists, and business leaders throughout Long Island. The medical professionals work extensively in community outreach to try and get the word out to the public about how to live a heart-healthy life. The business leaders focus on fundraising and awareness.

**How is funding right now?** Funding is pretty good, actually. Like any not-for-profit, there are challenges. Dollars are spread thin among disparate interests. But the brand of the American Heart Association is pretty powerful. And virtually everybody knows somebody who has suffered from cardiac disease.

**What can you do to try to create a healthful workplace?** To get your company to be fit-friendly means you get behind them and show them. The heart association and the website show them what their food choices should be. It gives them exercise alternatives.

**What do you do at your company?** We try to get teams to walk in the Heart Walk, participate in runs and walks all the time. We encourage living a heart-healthy life by trying to get folks to participate in these activities and educating folks on what exercise and good eating does for establishing a heart-healthy life. It's all about education. We have had CPR training classes in the office. We had AEDs installed here and set up teams with captains who are, in case of emergency, the ones to go to for use of the AEDs.

**How can someone make a difference?** You have to find a way. Everybody in their own small way can have a place to make a difference. Forty years ago, people had high cholesterol. They just died. With grassroots organizations and the use of CPR, that empowers.