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Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

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Press Release for Andy Lubbers Be Nice Fund

February 21, 2017

Arend D. Lubbers

Sadness lurks when someone you love finds living unbearable and hopeless, and acts to end it. Even if you can accept the act, the sadness sneaks out at times and envelops you. It is only human to find ways to deal with it, to alleviate it. We were presented a way by Christy Buck and Jeff and Sheri Elhart. Christy is Executive Director of the West Michigan Mental Health Foundation and Jeff is a Holland businessman. It was his brother Wayne's suicide and the sadness that it brought to the Elhart family that prompted cooperation with Christy Buck to find ways to help people who could be on a track toward ending their own lives. Bullying, social isolation, and early symptoms of mental illness in school age females and males from middle school through high school and among the college student population led to the initiation of the Be Nice Program. Be Nice is a program that creates an environment of friendliness, inclusiveness, and help in schools with the purpose of reducing suicide. Where Christy and Jeff have cooperated in Ottawa, Muskegon, and Oceana counties, the schools have embraced the program. Even some for-profit companies are participating or considering it. Gifts usually are given to a local community foundation and dispersed as matching grants to the institutions which are implementing the program.

The success on the Lakeshore motivated Christy and the Elharts to ask us to establish the Andy Lubbers Be Nice Fund in Kent County at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation with a lead gift. Nancy and I responded positively to their request. We have taken action to assuage our grief and honor the good qualities of our son, and our love for him. With all of his troubles, there was

an aspect to his character that relates to an objective of the Be Nice Program. Throughout his school days, he was a leader culminating in his becoming President of the senior class at East Grand Rapids High School. After his death, we heard from classmates, grade school and high school, throughout the country who told us of their insecurities and often low self-esteem who said Andy was always nice to them. Andy asked in a note to be remembered for his good qualities. Being nice was his hallmark. His mother and I want to remember that. Giving life to the Be Nice Program in Kent County is our way of doing it.

After his death, many of his friends, ours, and friends of our son's and daughters contributed in his memory to the West Michigan Mental Health Foundation, and the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation. We are awed and emotional about the response, a demonstration of caring when we most needed it. Now we are hoping that there will be a generous response in support of the Be Nice Program. What parent, grandparent and interested friends of the schools can resist a plan to make the school environment more friendly, and just maybe save some lives of imperiled children or youth who need help at a crucial time in their young lives? We ask that you consider a gift to the Andy Lubbers Be Nice Fund at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. You may save a life.