

SOUTH TAMPA NEWS

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On May 1, people locally and around the world will celebrate Global Love Day, an initiative founded by South Tampa resident Harold Becker and his nonprofit group The Love Foundation. Alexandra Miller, an eighth-grade student at Dunbar Middle School in Fort Myers, brings the holiday's theme, "Love Begins With Me," into colorful life with her award-winning poster, shown here.

Celebrating Global Love Day

'HOLIDAY WITHOUT BOUNDARIES' MAY 1

By MITZI GORDON
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In 1990, Harold Becker walked away from a high-level banking career. He did it for love.

Not love of a single person or of a new profession. Becker was driven to devote his life to unconditional love.

"The more we love ourselves, and the better we are to ourselves, the more we love other people," he said. "If we can help people be more in tune with themselves, that's where global change comes in."

After years of travel and

"The goal is to make Global Love Day every day."

HAROLD BECKER
founder, The Love Foundation

study, Becker distilled self-help theory into these simple tenets, hoping to touch off a worldwide ripple effect. His first book, "Internal Power: Seven Doorways to Self Discovery," was published in 1993.

Several years later, the South Tampa resident woke up with new inspiration and The Love Foundation was born.

The not-for-profit organization, officially founded in 2000, has a simple goal: inspire people to love

unconditionally.

"It's the person that's the link," Becker said. "Businesses, governments, communities - they're all made up of people. Change has to happen on a personal level. If you love yourself first, and understand self-acceptance, then you can love others."

"Groups of people are beginning to recognize that what happens in one place affects everybody. We all laugh, we all cry ... we're all in it together."

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The foundation celebrated its first Global Love Day event in 2004, described by Becker as a "worldwide international holiday in the spirit of unconditional love."

Networking via the Internet, the group was contacted by people in some 34 countries, including Africa, Italy and France, who participated by staging community events.

This year, that number has grown to nearly 70, and country coordinators from as far away as Kenya, Nigeria, Nepal and Australia are getting involved on a local level.

The second annual Global Love Day takes place May 1, championing the theme "Love Begins With Me." The holiday has garnered official proclamation from Mayor Pam Iorio and commendations from Tampa City Council, as well as honors from cities throughout the United States.

Here in South Tampa, one celebration will be held at The Lotus Room, 1101 W. Kennedy Blvd., from 2 to 6 p.m. Expect everything from belly dancing

and didgeridoo music to light meditation and yoga at the unstructured event. Vendors will sell handcrafted products such as jewelry, stained glass and natural soap. Little ones can enjoy face painting and interactive music. Refreshments will also be available.

In addition, Yogani Studios, 1112 W. Platt St., will offer a meditative yoga nidra session from 5 to 6:30 p.m. May 1 and donate all class fees to The Love Foundation.

The whole idea is to come in, feel good and set aside differences in a single celebration of humanity, Becker said.

Deby Ciacciarelli, owner of Natural Mystic soap company, helped organize the Lotus Room event.

"There are so many divisions and walls in this world," she said. "This is about love, about everybody being in one place where we can cross over the boundaries of things that divide us. It's a great concept."

Around the world, individuals and organizations such as

Teachers Without Borders and Korean Association of Retired Persons will hold events to honor and spread the message.

One young girl from France wrote Becker to say she'd celebrate the day on a mountainside, meditating about love. An African youth group from Mombasa, Kenya, plans to bring supplies to the famine-wracked village of Kibandaongo. A Fort Lauderdale resident will host a children's art class at her Unity church.

"Love is what's going to heal," Becker said. "It's really about acceptance. Be present and do your part. The goal is (to) make Global Love Day every day."

For directions to local events, call The Lotus Room at 254-6777 or Yogani Studios at 251-9668.

To find out more about The Love Foundation and Global Love Day, visit www.thelovefoundation.com.