

Making a Difference

The Yankees' Commitment

An Interview with Randy L. Levine,
President, The New York Yankees

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to becoming President of the New York Yankees, Randy Levine served as the Chief Labor Negotiator for Major League Baseball, and negotiated the landmark labor agreement in 1996, facilitating the sport's return to prominence. Having also served as Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General at the U.S. Department of Justice, he is a recipient of a BA from George Washington University and a JD from the Hofstra University School of Law. Levine also served as Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Administration and as Commissioner of Labor Relations for the city of New York.



Randy L. Levine

COMPANY BRIEF The New York Yankees is a premier Major League Baseball franchise based in the Bronx borough of New York City. Founded in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1901, they moved to the Bronx in 1903. As Major League Baseball's most successful franchise, the Yankees have won 26 World Series Championships and 39 American League Pennants, which also makes them the most successful franchise in North American sports history.

How important is community involvement to the New York Yankees?

It is essential. When we decided to stay in the Bronx and build a new stadium, we understood that there were bumps in the Yankees' relationship with the community. It wasn't anybody's fault; I think there was a disconnect. It became critical for all of us to reassure the public that community is important to us.

We are quite active in the community. We distribute tickets, grants, and equipment to a whole host of educational, recreational, and health-related community organizations. For the next 40 years, the Yankees are going to make grants – cash, tickets, and equipment – to a charitable trust formed by elected officials and community leaders in the Bronx. They will distribute these grants at their discretion to organizations in need. Demonstrating the Yankees' commitment to our fans, neighbors, and young people in the city and, in the Bronx specifically, is essential.

You touched on many areas of need, such as education, recreation, and health care. To be successful, do you hone in on

specific areas where you wish to make the most impact?

We are a professional baseball team, so recreation, health, and education are very important to us. We believe in empowering the people who live in the community. When I say the community, it is targeted, but not limited, to the Bronx.

We have fans who are senior citizens. So if a senior citizens center needs assistance, we will do what we can to make the lives of those who use it better. If we can make their day a bit special by bringing them to the ballpark, we do that.

Today, in professional sports, players earn a lot of money, but many give back and get involved. Do you make this a part of the Yankee culture?

Yes. The players have demonstrated a great willingness to step forward. Joba Chamberlain and Johnny Damon recently spent a great deal of time at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering pediatric cancer center, with which we are affiliated.

Others visit various youth centers. Mariano Rivera and Bobby Abreu were just at the Kips Bay Boys' Club; Derek Jeter has his own foundation; and Alex Rodriguez has been out and about in the community. We urge the players to remain committed, and they understand how committed we are to helping the community.

With the development of the new stadium in the Bronx, is this message of commitment getting across to the public?

We have spent a lot of time and money trying to get the message out. We want people to understand what we are about.

We have hired many people from the community who are working on the stadium – it gives us a great sense of pride. Tens of millions of dollars have gone to Bronx contractors. It has been a real success story.

Nine years ago, did you know this role was something you were going to stay with?

Yes. I go back with George Steinbrenner quite a long time. I've been in baseball for a long time; I was the Chief Labor Negotiator for Major League Baseball. I understand how the baseball industry works and how business works. My role as Deputy Mayor and Labor Commissioner allowed me to understand how the city works. We have accomplished three of



my main goals: We created the YES Network, we are building a new stadium, and we are expanding the Yankee brand all over the world. I take great pride when I travel and see people wearing Yankee hats or Yankee shirts.

Is there growth for the brand in the international markets?

It is a very complex formula, because although the brand is expanding, many of the rights aren't ours – they belong to Major League Baseball. However, we think there is tremendous benefit, because the more people who know about the Yankees, the more who come to New York and go to our games and buy our merchandise. We are building the brand in China, Japan, Latin America, and elsewhere, continuing to illuminate Yankee pride and what the Yankees stand for: winning with pride and dignity. Obviously, winning on the field is our number-one priority.

We won four World Series, and we've been to the World Series six times in the past 12 years. The value of the Yankees continues to grow. I think *Forbes* estimated it last year at \$1.2 billion just for the team; others have estimated the value of the YES network to be close to \$3 billion. It is our job to continue to increase the value and explore new ways to increase revenue in order to continue to deliver a championship-caliber product.

Some would think that with an organization like the Yankees, the expectation is always to win a championship.

From George Steinbrenner on down – we feel if we do not win the World Series, it is a failure. It is a high standard, but it is the one we live by. ●

Yankees pitcher Joba Chamberlain entertains children at the cancer treatment center at Memorial Sloan Kettering