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## **Attitudes In Reverse® Honors Joe Papa, Founder and CEO of TruVersity, as *Champion of Hope***

PRINCETON, NJ, September 24, 2025 –Since Joe Papa, Founder and CEO of TruVersity, had experienced depression with family members during his childhood, he was naturally drawn to supporting Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®). “I really feel that they have such a great mission because they were reaching kids in such a unique way and giving them an opportunity to get help and support when they needed it most,” Papa said. He has been supporting AIR since 2022 and will be honored with a *Champion of Hope Award* during AIR’s 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Taste of Hope event on October 8, 2025, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal, Princeton, NJ.

“I’ve volunteered on several occasions to go out to schools and help run events. Two things really stand out to me: the In Their Shoes® exhibit, for which celebrities and others donated shoes with messages of hope, allowing kids to see that even people they admire have faced struggles, and the presence of the therapy dogs at the events. It’s powerful to watch kids instantly relax and open up in a casual, supportive atmosphere when they interact with the dogs,” Papa said.

The In Their Shoes exhibit also includes legacy shoes, which had belonged to adolescents and adults who have taken their own lives, and others that have been donated to reinforce AIR’s message that mental health disorders can affect anyone. These shoes have examples of thoughts that go through individuals’ minds when they are struggling. “The goal is twofold: to build empathy and understanding in order to eliminate stigma and discrimination among those who do not have mental health conditions; and to let those with mental health challenges know that they are not alone,” explained AIR Co-Founder Tricia Baker.

With her expertise as a dog trainer and personal experience of benefiting from the emotional support that dogs provide, Tricia has built partnerships with certified therapy dogs and their owners to bring mental health benefits to AIR’s programs beyond the education. “At every presentation, students have opportunities to pet the AIR Dogs, and many of them open up about their mental health struggles. For many, it’s the first time they ever felt they had permission to ask for help,” Tricia said.

“We are so grateful for Joe’s support to help us bring our educational programs and therapy dogs to many more students in kindergarten through college throughout New Jersey,” said AIR Co-Founder Kurt Baker. “Education about mental health, including coping strategies, is essential for all ages and for older students and adults, it’s also critical to know the signs of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. We not only provide this knowledge, but also encourage everyone to open up about their

**More**

## Attitudes In Reverse® Honors Joe Papa/Page 2 of 2

mental health challenges with the dogs and other strategies that have been proven to be highly effective,” Kurt said.

“Suicide prevention and mental health awareness have always been close to my heart. I believe everyone has unique gifts and the potential to live an amazing life. When life is cut short, especially for a teenager or child, it saddens me deeply. I was impressed by AIR’s unique approach — using dogs and the celebrity shoe displays to engage youth, build awareness, and create opportunities for support. The fact that AIR helps kids navigate these challenges and recognize when someone might need help is powerful,” Papa said.

“It’s a magical gift that Tricia and Kurt have shared, transforming their own painful experiences into something that brings hope and healing to others. We often forget how powerful we can be — that by sharing our stories, someone listening might find hope and that may even save their life. For that, I am grateful,” Papa added.

Papa will be honored along with fellow *Champion of Hope* Radwa Saad, DMD, a nationally recognized cosmetic and implant dentist at Dent Blanche Dental; and Partners in Hope Brenda Pfau, a teacher in the Hopewell Valley Regional School District, West Windsor Gives Back and Neelima Mahapatra, Founder of AmileenScapes.

AIR is most appreciative of the Taste of Hope event sponsors Summit Dental Partners; Dr. Dayna Zoller; Szaferman Lakind Attorneys at Law; Stark & Stark Attorneys at Law; Philadelphia Insurance Companies; Leary, Bride, Mergner & Bongiovanni P.A. Attorneys at Law; Ocean First Bank; Princeton Brain & Spine; Renzi Legal Resources; and Hinkle, Prior & Fischer Attorneys at Law; J. Robert Bratman; Sasha’s Sitters; Hofing Management; BeTheLi9ht Foundation; Dr. Nirav Shah; Torrieri Contracting, LLC; Champagne Law Group, LLC; Mike & Paula Mumola; Best Version Media and *Princeton Living Magazine*; Moore Engineering Services, Certified Wealth Management; 20 Paws; and Robert Wood Johnson.

AIR is equally grateful for the participating restaurants and dessert, wine and spirit vendors: A&A Distributors, ABC Indian Grill, Amalfi’s Kitchen & Bar, Anna Mae’s Catering, Black Pearl, Bonfish Grill, Buy Rite Wines & Spirits, Carella's Chocolates, Crown of India, Iron & Ivy at Princeton Marriott, McCaffrey’s, Outback Steakhouse, PF Chang's, My Pink Little Cake, Public Wine, Beer & Spirits, Texas Roadhouse, Railroad Distillery, Seasons 52 and Starbucks.

To register to attend the Taste of Hope event or make a donation, please visit <https://toh.ngo/>.

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Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®) was established by Tricia, Kurt and Katelyn Baker of Plainsboro, NJ, in 2010, soon after their son/brother Kenny died by suicide following a long battle against severe depression and anxiety. Their mission is to save lives by educating students about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention. Since January 2011, they have presented to more than 250,000 students in elementary, middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Missouri, Texas and Arizona. AIR also offers the AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds<sup>SM</sup> program, bringing dogs into schools to help students de-stress and engage in the conversation about mental health. In addition, AIR trains and certifies Emotional Support Animals and offers a lunch-and-learn program for businesses. For more information about AIR, please visit [www.air.ngo](http://www.air.ngo) or call 609-945-3200.

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