

Tony Cornelius Leads Suicide Awareness With Don Cornelius Foundation

Written by Forward Times Staff
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The question of why Don Cornelius took his own life in February may never be answered, but the TV and music icon's son is spearheading a campaign of suicide awareness to prevent others from experiencing the same type of loss that befell him.

The result is the Don Cornelius Foundation, an organization that "not only concentrates on suicide awareness but it also focuses on providing information to people who are in need."

"This is a huge, huge issue and it's an issue that has a veil of shame over it. People are still very uncomfortable with who's talking about suicide," Tony Cornelius detailed to EURweb's Lee Bailey. "Breast cancer at one time was something that was under the table. Women didn't want to discuss it. AIDS was something that was under the table. No one wanted to discuss it. I mean, I think this is an opportunity to bring this to the surface."

The creation of the foundation comes months after the suicide of Don Cornelius. Tony Cornelius admits to coping with his father's passing on a day to day basis.

"I have good days and I have bad days. I was very, very close to my father. We talked every day. We had a good father and son relationship," he said. "When I say a good father and son relationship, I mean we covered the gambit. Sometimes we were upset with each other. Many times we were very happy with each other. So I mean that's life and that's family. I'm doing fine. I'm doing really well."

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Although the desire to create the foundation was automatic, Cornelius revealed his motivation for quickly forging ahead with the idea came from a legendary source.

“Actually, this idea to move forward as quickly as possible really came from Stevie Wonder,” the activist said. “I had a conversation with Stevie some three or four days after my father’s death and (he) suggested to me that I do something about it and life is worth living.

“The slogan for the foundation is ‘Life is beautiful, precious and worth living’ and I really learned that from Stevie Wonder,” Cornelius added. “He spoke to me candidly and he made an impression on me and that type of impression really brought me to wanting to help people who are transitioning. In other words, those that have family members who have committed suicide and those that are thinking about suicide. So he was really the one that spawned this concept for me and I’m grateful to him for it.”

The foundation is currently building its board of directors and board of advisors as well as planning fundraising opportunities and aligning itself with a help line that will immediately provide information to those in need and “companies who are in the business of helping people.”

“Our mission is to help companies that exist, that are doing these things for a number of years using professionals, people who understand mental illness, suicide, depression, accidental death when it comes to suicide and depression,” said Cornelius.

One advantage on Cornelius’ side is his father’s celebrity, a point he says positions the former “Soul Train” host as “the face of suicide awareness.” With that, Cornelius is well aware of how suicide doesn’t discriminate.

“I think our target is all people. It’s not those that just knew my father we’re targeting. It’s anyone. I don’t think suicide has a claim of reference. It’s in the air. It’s colorless, in other words, but our community has a very high percentage of young black males that are now deciding to transition this way and we’re very active in that area,” he said. “... if we can save one person or if we can ask ‘how can I help you?’ or where does it hurt?’ we’ve done what we’re supposed to do. So it really takes people who can see, who can pay attention, who can say ‘I have a friend of mine that’s in a bad way and I really want to help.’ That’s really what it’s about. If someone

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had asked my father 'How can I help you and where does it hurt?' he may have answered the question. But if you don't ask those questions, you will never know."