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Speaker to focus on children’s safety

By Michael J. Solender

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Michele Gay is on a mission.

Gay, one of the country’s leading advocates for improved school security and safety, wants to educate children and those responsible for their safety.

Gay lost her daughter, Josephine Grace, on Dec. 14, 2012, in the Newtown, Conn., Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, in which 28 people were killed.

Gay will speak Aug. 8 at the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club, a business development and networking group that meets at Carmel Country Club in SouthPark.

Gay is a mother, teacher and co-founder of Safe and Sound: A Sandy Hook Initiative.

Gay, with six other Sandy Hook families, turned her grief into positive energy to work with community members nationwide to develop safety-education programs based on three core principles: Assess, Act and Audit.

“We’re proud to bring Michele to Charlotte to share her story of triumph over tragedy,” said Jenn Snyder, executive director of the Hood Hargett Breakfast Club. “Her journey back to hope and action are important lessons for us all.”

“The initiative started as an outgrowth of several families dealing with our grief,” Gay said. “We couldn’t believe in the years beyond Columbine that no one was addressing safety and security in the schools. We formed Safe and Sound as a nonpartisan, grass-roots approach to unifying the national school community in addressing these issues. We wanted to avoid the divisiveness that often surrounds political issues, such as gun control, and look to what we could accomplish that could be positive and deal with violence in our schools in a completely

• Learn more:

- Hood Hargett Breakfast Club: <http://hoodhargettbreakfastclub.com>.

This month’s breakfast will be 7:30-9 a.m. Aug. 8 at Carmel Country Club, 4735 Carmel Road.

- Safe and Sound: www.safeandsoundschools.org.

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 A portrait of Michele Gay, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a blue sleeveless top and a necklace. She is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera.

different way.”

Safe and Sound provides resources that address safety of public spaces, response in time of crisis and issues beyond shootings such as weather emergencies, fires and natural disasters.

Alissa Parker is a Safe and Sound co-founder and mother of Emilie Parker, another child killed in the Newtown shooting.

“We wanted to create a framework for folks to work with and take into their own communities,” said Parker in a recent interview.

Gay, Parker and a team of nationally recognized safety advisers and professionals have created a website and a series of resources to help establish safety plans. The organization fields inquiries from all 50 states.

Gay and Parker speak nationwide to community leaders, school resource officers, law enforcement officials, first responders, PTAs, school administrators and representatives of local municipalities. Their educational materials and discussion guides are available free at the website.

“Our materials are designed as a starting-off point and not a single source solution to school safety,” Gay said. “We recognize communities are unique with different cultural issues, geographies and available resources. We want to help start the discussion.”

Michael J. Solender is a freelance writer. Have a story idea for Michael? Email him at michaeljsolender@gmail.com.



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