

# Lukasik to address NYC law students

**BY MATT CHANDLER**  
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For attorney Dan Lukasik, helping fellow lawyers deal with depression has been a sort of therapy in itself. Now he's taking his act on the road.

Lukasik, who last year created a Web site and support group for area lawyers with depression, will be speaking to students at 12 New York City-area law schools beginning this spring at the invitation of the David Dawes Nee II Foundation.



David Nee was a Fordham University Law student who committed suicide in 2005 after silently waging his own battle with depression. His law-school friends and family members started the foundation in his name as a means to educate others about the disease. They found Lukasik through his Web site, [www.lawyerswithdepression.com](http://www.lawyerswithdepression.com).

Andrew Sparkler, president of the Nee Foundation, calls Lukasik "a great inspiration."

"Our goal is to educate and to

encourage people to recognize (that depression) is a very big issue in our society," he said. "It is our hope that Dan is a very big part of that initiative going forward."

Lukasik, who is managing partner of the Buffalo law firm Cantor Lukasik Dolce Panepinto, says he has a few basic messages he wants to share with the aspiring lawyers.

"First, I want to talk about the fact that they are at risk for depression and let them know if they are suffering with it, they aren't oddballs or strange, but they are actually, statistically, in a very large group."

He says he wants the students to understand exactly what depression is and isn't in the hopes that early identification of the illness might spur some of them to seek help.

In addition to his upcoming work with the Nee Foundation, Lukasik has formed a nonprofit organization, Lawyers Overcoming Depression Inc., as an avenue to continue to spread the message that depression within the law community is a serious problem that needs to be dealt with.

"There are 5,000 lawyers in Western New York, and it is estimated that 1,250 of them suffer from some form of depression," Lukasik says. "There is such a stigma attached to depression in general, and I think more so in the legal profession, where lawyers are supposed to be invulnerable.... They are supposed to have all of the answers."

## Raising awareness

Andrew Sparkler was at a crossroads. As president of the David Dawes Nee II Foundation – an organization founded in honor of his friend, a Fordham University student who committed suicide in 2005 – he was looking to take the foundation to the next level.

"For the first two years, we were mostly a seed organization and we were discussing how we could develop a unique program to get our message across," Sparkler said.

The "message," he said, is to raise awareness of the prevalence and dangers of depression among lawyers and to offer resources to those who may be at-risk, as Dave Nee was when he took his own life three years ago.

After seeking resources and materials online, Sparkler said he was "hitting nothing but dead ends" and became increasingly frustrated at the lack of information available to help lawyers cope with what has been a closeted issue for many.

"I couldn't find anything that addressed depression

at the lawyer level until eventually I came across Dan's (Buffalo attorney Dan Lukasik) Web site ([www.lawyerswithdepression.org](http://www.lawyerswithdepression.org)), and it was like finding a needle in a haystack. The resources he has on the site are overwhelming."

After speaking with Lukasik, he presented the information to the board of directors of the Nee Foundation, who he described as "equally excited about Dan's passion." An alliance was formed.

The Nee Foundation envisions having Lukasik share his personal experiences battling depression, as well as the wealth of knowledge he has gained on the subject in the past two years, through a series of speaking engagements at law schools in and around New York City.

"He is so focused on this mission in a very nuts-and-bolts, realistic way," Sparkler said. "He is so warm and welcoming, so passionate about this, we were really excited to make this happen."

—Matt Chandler