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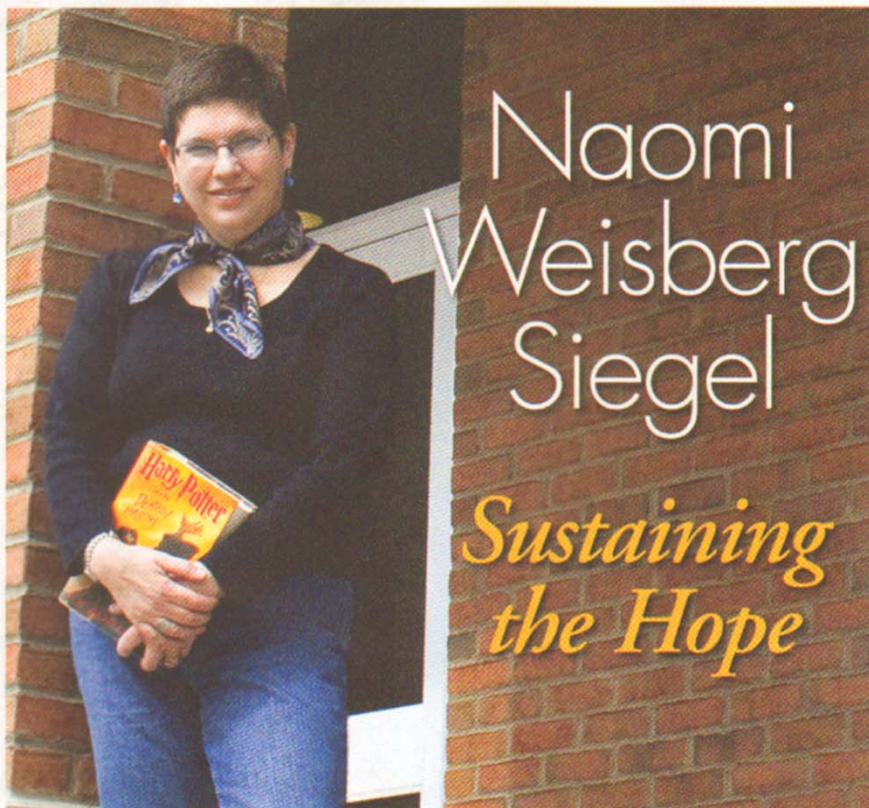
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PERSONALITY PROFILE

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

PHOTO BY MELODY FARRIN



Naomi Weisberg Siegel

Sustaining the Hope

Siegel on the steps of the new Cooper-Siegel Community Library.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a corner of our community left untouched by the extraordinary generosity of Naomi Weisberg Siegel and her husband, Eric C. Cooper. Since forming the Cooper-Siegel Family Foundation in 2000, the couple has been volunteering and supporting charitable causes throughout the area.

Cooper is a distinguished service professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University and serves on the school's board of trustees. Proceeds from the sale of his Internet switching company FORE Systems to Marconi in 1999 were used to create the family foundation, which pledged millions several years ago to build the Cooper-Siegel Community Library in Fox Chapel. The highly anticipated new library that just opened next to the borough's municipal building.

The foundation recently announced the gift of a \$1.5 million endowment to the Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry, which is administered by Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh. In keeping with this spirit of compassion, Siegel is also fighting hunger through Sweet! a true bakery, a custom baking service she founded last year with friend Betty Manuck. The women bake to order and deliver their goodies to the East End and Fox Chapel area. All profits go to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

Siegel and Cooper live in Fox Chapel—their home for the past 16 years—and have four daughters. *SHADY AVE* recently spoke with Siegel to find out what fuels her fire as a philanthropist and in the kitchen.

How did your interest in philanthropy begin?

It came from my parents, who were very civic-minded. Even though my mother had five children to take care of, she found time to volunteer for various causes. It was also a topic of conversation in our household—what the world was like and what could have been done to make it a better place. Before my father, a former physics professor at William & Mary, passed away, I asked him about his philosophy to life. He was 71, and he said that no matter how old you get, you should never lose your sense of hope, your sense of wonder, and your sense of outrage. As a physicist, he still saw the wonder and the mystery of the world. As a human being, he saw the outrage that things should have been better. I always thought it was important that he put the hope first. You have to do something with that outrage, and if you turn it toward doing something, you can sustain the hope.

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What will the new library mean to the community?

My feeling about libraries is that they are socialism personified. Free public libraries are one way that people in a community help each other because they provide free information. And information is power. If you can find the information that you need, then you can work with it, use it, and educate yourself and others. You can find pleasure and relaxation, as well. I think it will enhance all of our lives.

What's the last book you read?

I just read *Suamplandia!* [by Karen Russell] and an amusing book called *I Think I Love You* [by Allison Pearson], which was fun. I also just finished *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky* [by Heidi W. Durrow]. Next up is *Martin Chuzzlewit* by Dickens. So many books, so little time! I don't get to read as much as I like to because I have a busy life. But when I go on vacation, I take a stack of paperback books with me and leave them around like breadcrumbs so I don't have to haul them back.

Why did you start a bakery where you donate all dough?

Betty and I started the bakery because we love baking. We were always trying new recipes and sharing them with each other. We called it Sweet! because that's what the kids say when they really like something. We didn't need to make a profit. We were both very lucky in that our families are taken care of, so we decided that we would donate it to a charity and decided on the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. I had volunteered there out on the distribution floor, sorting cans. I know the work that they do; it's well-run and it's a huge need. I also know that they need money more than they need canned goods.

What makes Sweet! "a true bakery"?

We bake from scratch, use butter, and don't use mixes. We do everything as though we're baking for our families. Our signature item is a butter rum cake. We have people who swear by it and beg for it. It's a big hit.

Where did you learn to bake and what do you find most rewarding about it?

My mother taught me. I baked my first loaf of bread when I was 12. It was a horror—it was

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Tell us about the charitable causes that are most important to you.

Education, hunger, financial need, and Jewish causes because we are Jewish. Education has always been an important cause. In fact, my very first donation where I had any money to give to anybody was \$25 that I gave to Beginning with Books about 24 years ago.

What does it mean to contribute to the community as a family? What lessons does it teach your children?

We have an annual meeting every year to discuss what donations we're going to make along with the members of the foundation. Aside from that, we always discuss it with our daughters as they reach 21, which is when they can be included in the meetings. We discuss what's important to us. We don't consult with them on everything, but we let them know what we are doing. We hope we're leading by example.

How has your work with the Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry opened your eyes to the problem of hunger in our neighborhoods?

It's become clearer to us over the years that hunger in Pittsburgh exists and that it's a big problem. In Squirrel Hill, for instance, they are about 1,000 families who qualify for food stamps. You may not think of Squirrel Hill having that sort of need, but it definitely does.

Tell us about some of the exciting features of the Cooper-Siegel Community Library.

It's more visible than the old library so people will find it more easily. It's a beautiful state-of-the-art library and has attractive, welcoming colors. When you walk through the doors, there's a reading room with a gas fireplace and a circulation desk that curves around and sweeps you into the library. There's also a local history room. About one-third of the library is the children's area, including a crafts room and a computer room for kids. There's a large meeting room for community meetings...and ample parking. Any library is a wonderful library. But the physical space does affect how the workers and patrons feel about it and how it functions. To have a nice, physical plant is just wonderful. It's going to become a popular place.

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heavy, dry, and it was terrible. But it won a bread-baking contest that was being held by a local hotel because it was better than the other four kids' heavy, dry loaves. I won \$25 for it, and in 1970, that was a lot of money for a kid. That's not why I loved it. I liked the process. I find bread baking very satisfying. I like to knead things by hand even if they were kneaded by a machine. I need to feel it to know if they were kneaded enough and if they have the right balance of flour and moisture. I find satisfaction in making good things that make people happy. And baking is a very happy business. Everybody is delighted when they hear that's what you do.

Do you have a favorite "sweet"? How do you resist eating too many of your delicious confections?

I go back and forth between cheesecake—which is my all-time favorite—chocolate Picassos, a chocolate chip cookie taken to the

nth degree, and the butter rum cake. I just can't choose one. It's like choosing your favorite child. You like them each for different reasons. We're not eating too many of our sweet things. We probably each got a little plumper since we started this bakery, but you should never trust a skinny cook!

Are there any gems of baking wisdom you could share with us?

Always use butter, never margarine. Some recipes call for a little bit of shortening like Crisco and that's OK. But given the choice, always go with butter. I also always sift ingredients to get lumps out. And if you are really serious about getting a consistent product and having things turn out according to the recipe, you should use a scale instead of a measuring cup. A good scale is invaluable. Baking is part chemistry and part physics, and if you can be as precise as possible, you can get better results.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love to read and I love to swim. I also knit for relaxation. I'm currently knitting chemo caps for women who lost their hair. I also knit premie caps for premature babies in the [neonatal intensive care unit] at Children's Hospital.

What do you enjoy most about living in Fox Chapel?

I love the green spaces and the quiet. In fact, the biggest disruption in my day is hearing the sound of the train as it's funneled up the valley from down by the water. I love hearing that sound. It always brings home to me how relatively remote and quiet Fox Chapel is. I also like the fact that we are only 20 minutes from anywhere in Pittsburgh. SA

For more information about Sweet! a true bakery, visit www.sweetbakery.org or call 412-759-3205 or 412-780-2109.



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