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## Blind Lawyer Urges Disabled Students, 'Follow Your Dreams'

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**Richard Salem speaks Friday at the Able Trust Luncheon | Credit: Marcus JosephHide**

Blinded by a baseball that struck him in the head during a high school game just before his junior year, attorney and disabilities advocate Richard Salem stood before a crowd of disabled teenagers Friday and urged them to work to overcome any obstacles while pursuing their dreams.

"Listen to those who can help you," Salem told the youths, comparing the challenges of a disabled student learning to become a leader to his own experience of learning downhill skiing despite his blindness. "A dead leader is no leader at all."

Salem was a featured speaker at the 12th Florida Youth Leadership Forum at Florida State University's Doak Campbell Stadium, with the theme of "Leaders Building Leaders."

The youth leadership forum, which ended Saturday, is a four-day program co-sponsored by The Able Trust and The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. It's designed to teach Florida high school students with disabilities about career planning and leadership through workshops, social gatherings and mentoring opportunities.

The youth leadership forum is only one of numerous Able Trust efforts aimed at fostering the success of students with disabilities.



**Friday's Able Trust Luncheon |  
Credit: Marcus JosephHide**

According to a news release, the group has awarded more than \$27 million since 1990 to individuals with disabilities and nonprofit agencies throughout Florida for employment-related purposes, enabling thousands of those with disabilities to enter the work force each year.

The Able Trust youth programs are intended to help reduce the dropout rate and prepare young adults for life beyond high school.

“We are a foundation that plays a key role in providing grants to community organizations that teach students how to construct resumes and give interviews,” said Susanne Homant, CEO of The Able Trust.

According to Salem’s [website](#), Salem graduated cum laude from North Carolina's Belmont Abbey College in 1969 and from Duke Law School in 1972. Salem is the founding partner of the Tampa-based Salem Law Group and manages an active business and governmental practice.

In addition to the Florida Bar, he is a member of the American Bar Association, the American Blind Lawyers Association, and the International Bar Association.

Salem said he hopes his participation in events like Friday’s will help the trust continue its work.

“This is my time to help others and build bridges for others to succeed,” he said.

And that success requires constant effort, he told his audience.

“Your job as a leader never stops,” he said. “You never know who's watching ...

“Give it your all, give it your best,” he concluded. “And follow your dreams.”

For a video presentation, see Snap video [here](#).

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