

Itzler's a JELF Slam-Dunk

BY MARCIA CALLER JAFFE SEPTEMBER 7, 2016



Photo: *Jesse Itzler fascinates the audience with an animated presentation. (Photo by Sara Vogt)*

Atlanta superathlete, author and entrepreneur Jesse Itzler dazzled a rapt crowd of 670 at the annual **Jewish Educational Loan Fund** fundraising event Tuesday, Aug. 30, at **Flourish**.

Itzler traced his journey from brownie purveyor and kiddy pool attendant to rapper, co-owner of the Atlanta Hawks, co-founder of Marquis Jet, husband and father of four.

Honorees Stephen and Marianne Garber flank Steve and Eydie Koonin after a JELF event they all deemed a huge success.

His motivational message centered on “not dillydallying through life.” “Surround yourself with people on a mission,” he said. “Pattern your brain not to give up so easily. Most people quit at 40 percent, at the first inclination of pain. ... Many of our limitations are self-imposed.”



Photo by Marcia Caller Jaffe

A charmingly basic, hand-drawn slide illustrated Itzler's “time pie chart”: seven hours of sleep, three hours of personal time, eight hours for family life and six hours of work.

“Mental toughness determines much of your success,” he said

He also signed copies of his new book, “Living With a SEAL,” which will be part of the [Book Festival of the Marcus Jewish Community Center](#) on Nov. 13.

In introducing Itzler, honorary event chair Eydie Koonin recalled that he did the music for her son’s bar mitzvah ceremony. She and husband Steve, the CEO of the Hawks, agreed to match the funds raised that night up to \$100,000.

With that match, the event raised \$211,000, JELF CEO Jenna Shulman said, and sponsorships raised the net proceeds for the night to more than a quarter-million dollars. JELF uses the money to make no-interest college loans to Jewish students in Georgia, Florida, Virginia and the Carolinas and has a 99 percent repayment rate.



Photo by Sara Vogt

Jesse Itzler signs books with his wife, Spanx CEO Sara Blakely.

She thanked Itzler and the Koonins, as well as Legendary Events and founder Tony Conway for providing the venue.

Marianne Garber, JELF’s board chair and an event honoree with husband Stephen, spoke of her dedication to helping others through the legacy of her father-in-law, Al Garber, and praised Itzler, the JELF staff, and event chairs Joanne and Eddie Birnbrey and Nancy and Ronnie Galanti for an event that was “a dream come true. The sun, moon and the stars lined up.”

JELF supporter Robyn Spizman Gerson said: “The Garbers are generous individuals carrying on such a legacy of love. They are devoted to the next generation and making a life-changing difference.”