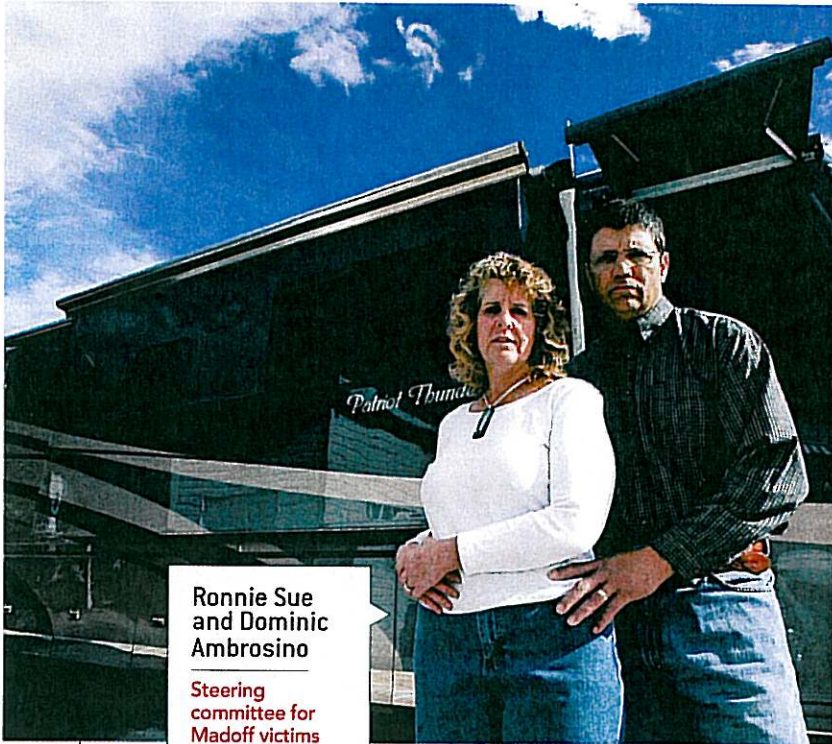


# Trendsetters

By Mike Vogel

{ Support Groups }



**Ronnie Sue and Dominic Ambrosino**

Steering committee for Madoff victims

Delray Beach

## Madoff Victims

Ronnie Sue Ambrosino began investing with the now-infamous Bernard Madoff 28 years ago. Now retired and living in Delray Beach, Ambrosino, 56, a former computer analyst, and her husband, Dominic, 48, a former corrections department employee in New York, were in Arizona, returning from a four-month RV odyssey to Alaska, when Madoff was arrested. With their \$1.6 million in savings gone into the ether, the couple were stranded. "Frankly, we can't get back to Florida," she said in February.

Via cell phone, an internet forum that she started and e-mail, Ambrosino reached other Madoff investors to form a 160-victim group. "If we come together as a group, we can be stronger," Ambrosino says. "We're not Steven

Spielberg and Sen. (Frank) Lautenberg and Kevin Bacon. We're little guys who worked our whole lives and saved our whole lives. There are people losing their homes. Every day my heart gets wrenched."

Ambrosino faults the SEC for not nabbing Madoff sooner, along with the IRS and the Securities Investor Protection Corp., an industry group that compensates customers of failed brokerages up to \$500,000 each. SIPC wants Madoff investors to establish their basis with records that Ambrosino, after 28 years, says she doesn't have. She says SIPC should pay based on investors' last Madoff statements. "We've written letters to congressmen and senators even the president of the United States. No one wants to hear from us."

## A Show of Gratitude

"Real Estate Lives" began as a discussion between land-use lawyer Ronald L. Weaver and others late last year about the real estate market. Weaver considered how well he had done through the years thanks to real estate and how dismal the job prospects were for the unemployed in that industry now.

"Real Estate Lives" is a group of volunteers who try to support and find jobs for the industry's unemployed. About 40 people have volunteered, including Amy Henrikson of Murray Co., Pam Winchester of Focus Real Estate Services and Steve Ernst of CLW Real Estate Services Group.

The morning after Tampa hosted the Super Bowl, a group of volunteers and unemployed met at the Greater Tampa Bay Realtors Association, keeping a twice-monthly schedule. "We meet with urgency," says Weaver, 59. "A month is too long to wait for people hurting on an hourly basis."

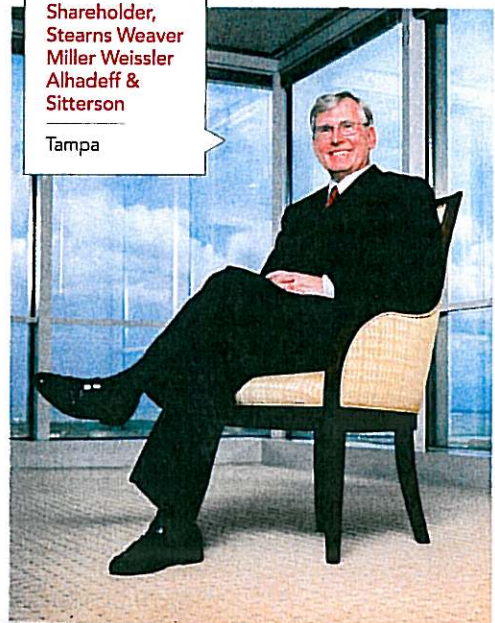
The first 118 resumes they received ran the gamut from laborers to executives. As of early March, 14 had been placed in jobs ranging from part-time college teaching posts to mortgage processing and even a project superintendent for a medical office building. "Real Estate Lives" has gotten inquiries from people who want to emulate it. "Those of us who were the beneficiaries of 13 good years

need to help those who made it possible," Weaver says.

**Ronald L. Weaver**

Shareholder, Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson

Tampa



Mark Wemple bottom