

# At-risk kids need a guiding hand

**T**he hit movie “The Blind Side,” – starring actress Sandra Bullock as Leigh Anne Touhey and actor Quinton Aaron as Baltimore Ravens rookie Michael Ohr – celebrates the power of mentorship.

The intervention of the wealthy Touhey family of Memphis in the life of Ohr, a homeless African-American teen, has warmed the hearts of moviegoers everywhere with its message of faith, hard work and family love.

Ohr’s is a one-in-a-million story. Not every kid with a dedicated mentor is ticketed for the NFL.

But troubled kids can overcome adversity to achieve personal success in life – if there’s an important adult in the wings pointing the way.

That’s what Katie Stebins, director of the MassMentoring Partnership, believes. To attract more people to serve as mentors for the region’s young people, the partnership has asked author Timothy Black, whose critically acclaimed book, “When a Heart Turns Rock Solid: The Lives of

Three Puerto Rican Brothers On and Off the Streets,” to speak in Springfield next month.

The author chronicles the Springfield brothers’ lives set against the backdrop of gang violence and drugs during the 1980s and ’90s in the city’s North End.

As told by Black, the story of the Rivera brothers – Fausto, Julio and Sammy – is ongoing, and the brothers continue to have their ups and downs. Along the way, however, Black, 51, who met the brothers through his graduate school work with at-risk students at the High School of Commerce, has helped them in a variety of ways. He has tutored and helped them find work and once even posted bail.

While the Rivera brothers’ story may not yet have the Cinderella ending portrayed in “The Blind Side,” we believe it is worth hearing.

We hope Black will inspire others to become mentors. The author will speak from 8 to 9:30 a.m. on Feb. 10 at Big Y Foods Inc. Corporate Conference Center, 2145 Roosevelt Ave.

