

Foster families enjoy a picnic in the park

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Nearly 130 Collier County children in the foster care system and their caregivers attended the sixth annual Lynn's Picnic hosted by Friends of Foster Children. The afternoon in Cambier Park was sponsored by First National Bank of the Gulf Coast.

"Lynn's Picnic is an opportunity for foster children to have a fun day and perhaps see other children in the community that they didn't realize were also in the system," says Stan Appelbaum, a former foster child and a co-founder of FFC.

The annual picnic is held in honor of the late Lynn Schultzel, another co-founder of FFC. "We founded this organization so that children in foster care can enjoy days like this when fun, laughter, food, toys and loving people surround them," says Ms. Schultzel's husband, Dr. Les Schultzel.

Not a fundraising event, the picnic included a bounce house, inflatable slide, cotton candy, popcorn, barbecue, hundreds of toys, face painters, a balloon artist and a T-shirt artist.

Pam Alvey, a grandmother who is fostering her four grandchildren, said they look forward to Lynn's Picnic each year. Ms. Alvey is single, on disability and lives in a three-bedroom home. "It's difficult to raise children on a fixed income, but FFC provides my grandchildren with clothing, shoes, Christmas gifts, summer camp, swimming lessons, gymnastics and baby necessities," she says.

Tina Williams is an adoptive mother and a foster parent. Her adoptive son, Zac, really wanted a sister, and 12-year-old Esmeralda was in a foster home with a co-worker of Ms. Williams, who fostered



COURTESY PHOTOS
Malachi, Serenidy, Lexie and Gage Alvey with "Melody Merry-maker" at Lynn's Picnic



Gage Alvey



Haven and Devon

Esmeralda for a year before adopting her.

"Being a foster parent has its ups and downs, but the good far outweighs the bad," Ms. Williams says. "We appreciate all that the FFC does for kids. Foster children need people who will love and be consis-

tent with them."

Adds 10-year-old Zac: "The picnic is a fun way for my family to be together."

The mission of FFC is to provide the abused, neglected and abandoned children in the foster care system with social, educational and financial support the state does not provide. This year FFC received a \$300,000 grant from the Naples Children & Education Foundation, founders of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, to provide for the 500 Collier County children in the foster care system.

The purpose of the items and services funded by the FFC is to enable foster children to explore new activities and find hidden talents that would otherwise go unknown, as well as to increase their self-esteem.

For more information, call 262-1808 or visit www.FriendsofFosterChildren.net. ■



COURTESY PHOTO

Gulf Coast High School sophomore Rebecca Rosenberg, a Charity for Change volunteer, received a Student Hero Award from Costco and will be recognized as a Distinguished Volunteer at the 2011 National Philanthropy Day celebration held by the Association of Fundraising Professionals-Everglades Chapter on Nov. 10. Miss Rosenberg has volunteered with Charity for Change since 2008, helping with curriculum development, charity research and selection; organizing classroom materials for teachers; selecting prizes for students; and volunteering at school and outreach events. ■