



Armani Castillo - Photos by Ben Walther



Middle: Blanca Hernandez

Below: Lunch Boxes of Love added 2,500 turkeys and chickens to its pre-Thanksgiving deliveries.



WHEN STARS ALIGN

Naples Winter Wine Festival 2013

LUNCH BOXES OF LOVE BITES BACK AT CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Combating children's hunger in Collier County is a big job. According to the annual Kids Count report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the numbers of impoverished children are growing: up two percent to 12,397 in 2009, which are the latest figures available.

"We know the increase is even greater today given the tough economic times," said Naples Children & Education Foundation grant chair Karen Scott. "That is why NCEF is passionate about finding a solution to childhood hunger in Collier County."

NCEF is the founding organization of the world's most successful charity wine auction, the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

LUNCH BOXES OF LOVE

NCEF trustees' quest for a solution to childhood hunger in Collier County began at the 2011 festival when they raised \$630,000 during bidding for a Lunch Boxes of Love fund-a-need auction lot. Wanting to turn cash into a system for delivering healthy food for kids as efficiently as possible, NCEF partnered with Harry Chapin Food Bank to implement an innovative and cost-effective approach. Together they outfitted a mobile food pantry and stocked it for weekly deliveries of nutritious food. The pantry's destination: schools and child-focused agencies with the most underserved and at-risk children in the county.

Since the first food delivery in February 2011, Lunch Boxes of Love has distributed more than 1.8 million pounds to tens of thousands of underprivileged and at-risk children and their families. There have been



Line at Lunch Boxes of Love food distribution

129 mobile pantry distributions and two in-school distributions. The deliveries contain fresh fruits, vegetables, canned goods, breads, cereals and meat.

“The children love getting what they think of as strange-looking things. We explain to them that they are fruits and vegetables and tell them the name of each piece of produce,” said Katie Schweikhardt, food coordinator in Collier County for Harry Chapin Food Bank. “We hope that providing healthy food to children will encourage them to eat better throughout their lives.”

While fruits and vegetables may be unfamiliar to many impoverished children, turkeys and chickens are more commonly known, especially around Thanksgiving. To help families enjoy bountiful holiday meals, Lunch Boxes of Love is adding 2,500 turkeys and chickens to its pre-Thanksgiving deliveries.

IN-SCHOOL PANTRIES

Lunch Boxes of Love is also beginning to stock in-school pantries and will have two fully stocked by year’s end. “These are actual food pantries within the confines of the school,” Schweikhardt explained. The initial in-school pantry was at Mike Davis Elementary, and due to its success, all others will be modeled after that one. The school pantries are being equipped with shelves from which families can choose the foods they like.



Top: Magali Nicol - 2 and Yahaira Torres Hernandez - 5
Bottom: Jennifer Alvarez, 2 years old



Top: Top: LBOL distributions total more than 1.8 million pounds of healthy foods
Bottom: Maria Ramirez (brown hat), with daughter-in-law Carla Ramirez and her two children Sarah and Jose



“Not everyone likes canned chicken or tuna fish, and the family does not have to take something they wouldn’t normally eat,” Schweikhardt said. The in-school pantries will also have cool storage for meats, and LBOL plans to deliver fresh produce prior to the pantry distributions.

With the 2013 Naples Winter Wine Festival gearing up for its Jan. 25 – 27 festivities, NCEF trustees again decided to dedicate the fund-a-need auction lot to alleviate hunger for the county’s most underserved children. Ready-to-eat meals will play a role in this next effort to take a bite out of children’s hunger in Collier County.

MORE ABOUT NCEF

Since 2000, Naples Children & Education Foundation has been dedicated to making a profound and sustaining improvement in the lives of underprivileged and at-risk children in Collier County, where pockets



Volunteer Sheila Jean-Paul assists Zara and son Armando Leyva

of poverty threaten thousands of children's ability to thrive. Through the Naples Winter Wine Festival, NCEF has raised \$107 million since 2001. Proceeds have impacted more than 150,000 children through 36 charities, and major initiatives funded in collaboration with other private and public entities have included a pediatric dental clinic and an early learning center.

For more information about Naples Winter Wine Festival and Naples Children & Education Foundation, visit www.napleswinefestival.com or call 888.837.4919.

MORE ABOUT HARRY CHAPIN FOOD BANK

Harry Chapin Food Bank solicits, collects and stores quality food for distribution to families in need through a network of nonprofit agencies in Lee, Collier, Hendry, Charlotte and Glades counties, who provide over 1 million pounds of food to more than 30,000 people monthly. For every dollar donated, about \$6 in food value goes back to the community. In the past calendar year, Harry Chapin Food Bank distributed more than 13.7 million pounds of food and other grocery items valued at more than \$22.5 million. This is roughly the equivalent of 11 million meals to people in need. For more information, visit www.harrychapinfoodbank.org.

HOW MANY COLLIER COUNTY CHILDREN GO TO BED HUNGRY?

Approximately 30 percent of households with children experience food insecurity – a general anxiety about where their next meals will come from. In addition, 49 percent of the people receiving food assistance from local food banks are children, and more than 61 percent of the children enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in Collier County are defined as economically needy and receive free lunch.

NCEF's drive to end childhood hunger is part of its strategic focus on providing a social safety net for the area's most at-risk children. Food distribution is one element of that strategy.

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