

# Charitable grants of \$7.9 million awarded by Naples Winter Wine Festival founders

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Trustees of the Naples Children & Education Foundation, founders of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, presented \$7.96 million in grant checks to charitable organizations benefiting Collier County's underprivileged and at-risk children during a ceremony April 10 at the Naples Botanical Garden.

Twenty-two charities received checks totaling \$5.82 million to help fund and expand programs and services. Grants ranged from \$25,000 (St. Matt's Camps for Kids Program) to \$1 million (Boys & Girls Club of Collier County).

"Grants presented today cover a range of children's services from building a playground at the Immokalee Child Care Center, to funding therapists at Catholic Charities for victims of sexual assault and familial sexual abuse, to grants for early learning at Guadalupe Center and through the Immokalee Early Learning Initiative," NCEF trustee and wine festival co-chair Cynthia Sherman said.

In addition, grants totaling \$2.14 million were awarded for multi-year, strategic initiatives aimed at fighting hunger, addressing behavioral health issues and increasing capacity and access to quality early learning programs.

Trustee Anne Welsh McNulty said a research study was key in determining grant allocations for this year and beyond. Conducted by the University of Florida's Lastinger Center for Learning and commissioned by NCEF, the study showed progress made in serving children's medical and dental needs. It also



NCEF trustees are all smiles as three young beneficiaries of the Lunch Boxes of Love program hold up a check representing the grant the charity received.

COURTESY PHOTO

revealed huge spikes in children's hunger and homelessness due to the economy, and showed that mental health and out-of-school needs remain critical. "There's lots more to be done," Ms. McNulty said.

NCEF's Lunch Boxes of Love initiative to end childhood hunger in Collier County was funded through a special auction lot at the January wine festival. The program utilizes a mobile pantry to provide nutritious meals for children and their families.

The foundation is also working on a permanent improvement to the food distribution system in the county for children in need. "This initiative will reach 50,000 to 60,000 children over three years — more than any other single NCEF initiative," said Robert Scott, NCEF trustee and board chair.

NCEF's H.U.G.S. initiative, which got under way after a fund-a-need lot at the

2010 festival raised more than \$600,000, is beginning to make inroads. Collaboratively run by several organizations, H.U.G.S. screens children for early identification of mental health issues and provides intervention. The initiative also spearheads a campaign to wipe out the stigma attached to mental illness.

In addition to the check presentations, the celebratory afternoon for 300 guests in the Garden included a mini-food festival presented by 11 Naples Originals restaurants. Guests also enjoyed wine from the 2011 Naples Winter Wine Festival.

Through the festival, NCEF has raised more than \$94.5 million since 2001, and proceeds have impacted more than 125,000 children through a total of 37 charities.

The 2012 Naples Winter Wine Festival will take place Jan. 27-29. For more information, call (888) 837-4919 or visit [www.napleswinefestival.com](http://www.napleswinefestival.com). ■