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Naples Children & Education Foundation Collaborates with FGCU College of Education to Reopen NCEF Early Childhood Development Center in Collier County

NAPLES, FL (April 9, 2024) – The Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, today announced that it has collaborated with the Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) College of Education to fully renovate, reopen and operate an Early Childhood Development Center serving at-risk and underprivileged children in Collier County.

Located on the campus of Florida SouthWestern State College – Collier County, the NCEF Early Childhood Development Center will support the educational research and training of high-quality early childhood education and care for children in Southwest Florida. Students and faculty from FGCU will conduct research and training in this building as part of the university’s “lab school” philosophy.

“The NCEF Early Childhood Development Center will provide access to high-quality early education to vulnerable children in our community,” said Maria Jimenez-Lara, CEO for NCEF. “We are proud to collaborate with the FGCU College of Education to support the teaching and learning of young children by providing high-quality early childhood education and care to local children and their families.”

Dr. Diana Cheshire, Dean of the FGCU College of Education, stated, “FGCU is honored to join forces with NCEF in the endeavor to reopen the NCEF Early Childhood Development Center. Our partnership recognizes the pressing need for high-quality, accessible early learning opportunities, ensuring that every child has a strong foundation for success.”

The NCEF Early Childhood Development Center implements a research-based early childhood curriculum that includes language arts, early literacy, dramatic play, music, art, science, and large and small motor skill development activities through integrated experiences, developmentally appropriate to each child’s age and stage of development. It will serve 93 children from 6-weeks to 5-years old.

The 10,519-square-foot facility is designed specifically for early childhood education with seven classrooms, a large motor room and an open atrium area for arts education. It was originally built in 2007 through the generous commitment of NCEF donors. The center closed in 2018 as a result of changes at Florida SouthWestern State College. Its reopening was further prevented by the pandemic.

The NCEF Early Childhood Development Center reopened on March 11th following a \$2-million renovation and operations grant from NCEF. The center is licensed by the Florida Department of Children and Families and is a Gold Seal Program certified by the State of Florida Southwest Early Learning Coalition. It is one of two Early Childhood Development Centers overseen by the FGCU College of Education.

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About Naples Children & Education Foundation

The Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, is improving the educational, emotional and health outcomes of underprivileged and at-risk children. Through its annual grants and strategic initiatives, NCEF has impacted close to 90 of the most effective nonprofits in the local community, providing more than 300,000 children with the services and resources they need to excel. NCEF's unique approach, which emphasizes collaboration between organizations and bridges public and private resources, has become a blueprint for how to transform a community, one issue at a time.

About Naples Winter Wine Festival

The Naples Winter Wine Festival (NWWF), one of the world's most prestigious charity wine auctions, offers a weekend of unforgettable memories. Guests enjoy world-class food and wine during intimate dinners in elegant, private homes and other landmark settings throughout Naples and are invited to bid on once-in-a-lifetime travel and wine experiences during an electrifying live auction. Since its inaugural event in 2001, the NWWF has raised almost \$302 million, making a profound difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in Collier County.

For additional information on the Naples Children & Education Foundation or the Naples Winter Wine Festival, contact Lisa Juliano at lisa@napleswinefestival.com or 239-514-2239.

About the FGCU College of Education

The College of Education at Florida Gulf Coast University offers diverse undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs focused on student success and community enhancement. With a commitment to excellence, the college provides comprehensive degrees in PreK-12 education, instructional design, school counseling, higher education, and a Doctor of Education in educational leadership. Embracing educational innovation, our faculty and students engage in cutting-edge research and technology integration, preparing graduates to lead in their fields. Our dedication to community collaboration is evident through the college's two early childhood development centers, serving as learning labs for our students, and engagement with alumni and other stakeholders to promote transformative education. Nationally accredited by CAEP and ASCA, the College of Education ensures rigorous standards and quality education."

For additional information on the FGCU College of Education, contact coecontact@fgcu.edu or 239-590-7800.