Children First 50th Anniversary Kickoff Luncheon

Children First kicked off the 50th Anniversary with a luncheon on January 13th at The Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota with over 300 in attendance. Judy Green, Leslie Jones, and Sophia LaRusso co-chaired the event which honored the Junior League of Sarasota for establishing Children First fifty years ago. Many members of the Junior League attended, including several of Children First’s founding mothers.

Stewart Stearns, President and CEO of The Community Foundation of Sarasota County, announced the 50 for the 50th endowment fund to support Children First programs. The Community Foundation is committed to providing $50,000 for this endowment, with an initial $25,000 coming from the Sarah Greer Mayer Fund. Children First’s 50 for the 50th will, with the help of others, grow to provide a permanent, secure base of support for Children First.

Many thanks to the women of the Junior League of Sarasota, The Community Foundation of Sarasota County, and event guests for the continued support which will make a difference in the lives of children and families served by Children First for the next fifty years.

Event Co-chairs: Judy Green, Sophia LaRusso & Leslie Jones

Stewart Stearns & Philip Tavill

Jane Longino, Adelaide Farrell, Joanne Bechtold & Bitsy Robertson

Mission Statement
Strengthening children and families by improving the quality of their lives through a comprehensive approach to development, education, health and well-being.
**Children First—The Next 50 Years**

Flying cars, robots performing housework, colonies on the moon…. people love to predict how our lives will change in the future but, as we well know when looking back, these predictions sometimes seem a little silly or are way off base.

However, the vision of the women of the Junior Welfare League (now the Junior League) when they founded Children First (then known as Sarasota Day Nursery) has held true for 50 years - providing very young children with the highest quality early childhood development experience and economically vulnerable families with opportunities for success and independence.

What does the next 50 years hold for Children First? First and foremost, continued dedication and commitment to our mission. This means planting the seeds to grow and nurturing a lifelong love of learning for our community’s most vulnerable children, ages six weeks to five years. It also means assisting families in identifying goals toward self-sufficiency and providing the support and encouragement needed to help them realize their dreams.

The world has changed a lot in the 50 years since Children First was founded. Over the next 50 years we will continue to address the challenges our children and families face in the same way that has led us to being nationally recognized as a Program of Excellence, one of only 22 Head Start programs out of 2,700 in the United States.

Over the past 50 years we have had the privilege of serving thousands of children and families. We have had the privilege of having thousands of volunteers in our classrooms and playgrounds. We have had many fine people from all walks of life serve on our Board of Directors. We have had the opportunity to get to know so many wonderful donors who have made our services possible.

Together, we have reached this truly significant milestone of our 50th anniversary. Together, we will move forward into the next 50 years and continue putting our Children First! I am so grateful for your commitment and passion for our mission.

Sincerely,

Philip Tavill
President and CEO

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The Traveling Little Black Dress is Forever Golden

Join us in the year long celebration of Children First’s 50th Anniversary.

**Tuesday, March 9, 2010**
Fleming’s Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar
2001 Siesta Drive, Sarasota
11:30a.m. - 1:00p.m.

Individual Tickets ~ $40.00 • Patron Tickets ~ $80.00

Proceeds from this fun event will benefit Children First.

For reservation call: (941) 953-5507, ext. 122.
Seating is limited to 175 guests.
On a crisp January morning, a group of preschoolers rushes into the classroom. They buzz with the excitement of being outside on the playground. They throw off their sweaters and jackets. Some are still trying to catch their classmates and tag them “out.” The shrill sounds of their laughter fill the room.

Once all the students are inside, the teacher asks everyone to gather in a circle on the floor near the bookshelf. Voices begin to lower as the children take their seats. “Imagine that when you breathe you are filling up a balloon,” she says. “You want your balloon to be as big as possible. Fill it slowly.” She puts her arms out as far as possible to demonstrate the size of the balloon. The children inhale deeply and raise their arms out to their sides. “Now slowly let all of the air out of that balloon.” Together, the children exhale. They all take five deep breaths in unison.

Teachers at Children First used breathing and other relaxation methods as part of the Get S.E.T. Project. Get S.E.T. focuses on a child’s social-emotional development as part of the teaching curriculum. Each theme incorporates several techniques to make up a Social Emotional Toolbox. In this manner, children learn hands-on the value of being respectful and demonstrating positive behavior. In December and January, children learned how to be more peaceful and how to rediscover silence. In a season when things tend to get busy and noisy, children may become more excitable and preoccupied. By understanding the importance of reflection and tranquility, they embrace a more peaceful behavior.

In 1938, under the shade of a large and deep-rooted tree, several members of the Sarasota Women’s Club founded the Newtown Day Nursery as a service for children in the community. In the early 1960’s, community leader Helen R. Payne became involved and the site was renamed the Helen R. Payne Day Nursery. The Center established itself as a community icon, and through its creation and cultivation, it became more than a nursery. Its focus shifted from day care to early childhood development. Like the strong branches extending from a healthy and nurturing trunk, the Helen R. Payne Center grew each generation’s future leaders and set roots in the community around it.

During the 1980’s the Center became a United Way organization, and in 1998 the Helen R. Payne Annex on Dr. Martin Luther King Way opened to further address the needs of children in Newtown. In 2004, the Helen R. Payne Day Nursery and Children First joined forces and merged for the development of children and families with the knowledge that they could do better together. By this time, the building itself began to show its age. Volunteers in the community spent time scrubbing floors, painting, hanging drapes, and decorating in a successful effort to bring new life to the building. With its branches pruned and its soil freshly fertilized, the Helen R. Payne Center, with the help of Children First, had the opportunity to offer better services to the community.

In 2009 Children First conducted extensive renovations to the site including replacing worn doors and windows, upgrading the plumbing, and replacing the floors. Today, 75 children and their families are served every year. The foundation of the site—the dedication to ensuring a high quality of life for children and families in the community—remains strong. The Helen R. Payne Center is prepared for another 50 years as Newtown’s icon for children.
Children First provides high quality services to Sarasota County’s most vulnerable children and families. To meet their needs, we are asking you to lend a helping hand in any of the following ways:

- Financially support the work of Children First.
- Volunteer in a classroom.
- Attend Children First events.
- Volunteer for a committee or event.
- Provide a set of books for a classroom for $25.
- Furnish a classroom with art supplies for $50.
- Supply a classroom with diapers for one month for $100.
- Be a Table Sponsor or donate an auction item for an event.
- We are always open to new ideas of how you can match your skills and talents to the needs of Children First.

If you are interested in supporting Children First in some way, please contact Angie Stringer at (941) 953-3877, ext. 124.

childrenfirst.net