

IMMOKALEE COMMUNITY ACADEMY PRINCIPAL AND STUDENT RECOGNIZED FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS



(L-R) RCMA Board members Linda Miles-Adams & Jaime Weisinger join in the celebration with Maria Jimenez, CEO of the Naples Children & Education Foundation, Zulaika Quintero, ICA principal, Cynthia O'Connell Florida Prepaid College Director and Isabel Garcia, RCMA Executive Director.

Florida TaxWatch (FTW) announced that Principal Zulaika Quintero of Immokalee Community Academy (ICA) in Collier County received the 2021 Principal Leadership Award and as part of this honor sixth-grader Uvani Lopez-Galvez was awarded a two-year college scholarship.

“Ms. Quintero operates with vision, transparency, and a deep understanding that every student can succeed,” shared Dr. Kamela Patton, Superintendent of Collier County Public Schools. “I congratulate her on this well-deserved honor.”

Migrant students face challenges far greater than most others. For example, many students must move in the middle of a school year. This requires that they learn to navigate a new environment and meet new teachers and friends. Some of those who don't move during the school year must take on the role of parent for their younger siblings until summer comes, when they can join their parents who have migrated north to follow the harvest season. Yet, despite these obstacles, students do succeed thanks to supportive teachers and family. That's why she selected Uvani as the recipient of this scholarship.

“I am excited to receive this award,” added Uvani. “My plans are to earn a degree in digital art, and now

with this financial assistance, I know I will succeed. Special thanks to my parents and teachers who always encourage me to do my best.”

Established by FTW in 2013, the Principal Leadership Awards program serves to acknowledge and reward educational leaders who are creating meaningful change in their students' lives, while also promoting their uniquely effective practices among their peers.

This program, which is the only one of its kind nationwide, recognizes nine of Florida's most successful principals from high-risk K-12 public schools across the state (three principals each from elementary, middle, and high schools, including traditional and charter public schools). Principals are selected based on weighted Florida Department of Education data such as improved test scores and grades, not through nominations.

“We are proud to support these scholarships with our Academic A+ Challenge Match Scholarship Program. We look forward to helping Uvani realize his potential,” added Cynthia O'Connell, Florida Prepaid College Foundation Director.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Isabel Garcia
Executive Director

Amazing things are happening throughout RCMA's 66 centers all because of your generosity and support! It's so exciting to see our volunteers, donors, and Board stay involved, get others involved, and help us do even more as we embark on the next 55 years of opening doors for children living in rural poverty, including the children of migrant families throughout Florida.

Demand for our innovative educational programming has outpaced our ability to meet the needs of parents and their children who want to attend our charter school or continue doing so. We have spent the past two years undergoing a strategic charter school growth plan, which includes the expansion of seventh and eighth grades at the Immokalee Community Academy and the addition of a new charter school in Mulberry, FL. This requires all of us to join in the most ambitious fundraising campaign in our 55-year history.

Ring the Bell: Be the Difference is a bold, \$14 million comprehensive fundraising campaign that will elevate resources to advance the RCMA mission. In Mulberry, FL, we plan to build a new state-of-the-art Dual Language School for grades K-8. More than 500 children and families will be served campus-wide.

I encourage you to visit our website RCMA.org/RingTheBell to learn more with our video featuring families who will benefit.



Linda Miles-Adams
Board member
and Charter School
Committee Chair

We are incredibly inspired by the growing support from our community of donors, families, Board members, foundations, and legislators to help secure the future of the children we serve. We have persevered through challenging times. Thanks to your generosity and support, we have a firm foundation to build upon. This campaign empowers RCMA to pursue its mission of creating opportunities and opening doors for children.

Ring the Bell is a campaign across all gift levels to create a culture of giving for generations to come. It is championed by Linda Miles-Adams, Board member and Charter School Committee Chair, Medora Krome, Board President, and a team of dedicated Board members. They have led through their own philanthropy and are building a network of donors throughout Florida to reach our goal.

I know many of you are inspired by the students and their families, so please join us as a volunteer and/or donor. Many in our RCMA family have stepped forward to lift up our students and families. That's why I am so excited to share the launch of Ring the Bell. It truly is our promise to 'Be The Difference.'

RCMA EXPANDS GRADE LEVELS IN IMMOKALEE

The District School Board of Collier County announced that it approved a grade-level expansion for Immokalee Community Academy (ICA) to grow from a K-6 to a K-8 program, starting in the 2021-22 school year.

“We are thrilled that the District School Board of Collier County has supported our parents’ desire to expand grade levels and provide a continuum for our innovative Dual Language model. This is the realization of a vision ICA parents have had for several years. It is also a result of hard work by an extraordinary team of our RCMA charter educators and our State office team” said Juana Brown, Director of Charter Schools.

“RCMA’s team developed and executed well-organized plans for student-centered, academically rigorous, fiscally sound schools. ICA’s approval for an expansion is based on its track record of operational, financial, and academic success in providing a tuition-free, public school option that is accountable for the outcomes of its students,” she added.

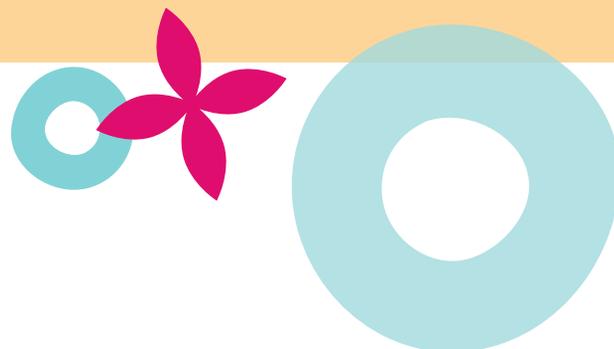
ICA’s culturally rich, Dual Language model is the Collier County Public School District’s only school offering such innovative programming. A substantial waitlist for its K-6 program indicated a strong need for an additional option for families and students who wanted to continue at the school.

“This expansion will help students who have been marginalized and underserved to have a reliable pathway to high school and beyond,” said Isabel Garcia, RCMA Executive Director.

ICS BECOMES IMMOKALEE COMMUNITY ACADEMY

RCMA also renamed ICS to Immokalee Community Academy. This was based on our unique Dual Language curriculum and expansion throughout the state of Florida. We have excelled in our accountability for both academic results and fiscal practices.

A 2019 report released by the Florida Department of Education shows that public charter schools are helping students achieve academically and, in many cases, charter school students are outperforming students attending district-run public schools. Additionally, RCMA charter schools also empower parents to become active participants in their child’s education.



BELOVED FORMER RCMA EMPLOYEE'S DREAMS COME TRUE

Most wouldn't know it, but behind Michael Facundo's smile, his journey has been full of challenges and adversity. Education was the route out of humble circumstances for this Immokalee native.

"When you grow up with nothing," said the RCMA alum, "all you have is your faith and hope that you'll meet the right people who will help you."

Against all odds, Facundo managed to overcome adversity and, six years later, graduated from college before beginning the job of his dreams - as an architect with RCMA. His determination, hard work, and grit are responsible for his success, but several people helped Facundo along the way, especially former RCMA Executive Director Barbara Mainster Rollason and Ted Hoffman, an architect.

"Working at RCMA was so rewarding," he added. "You learned about leadership through collaboration." While working, he commuted to Florida Atlantic University in Fort Lauderdale to earn a degree in Architecture. Often returning home at 2 a.m., he would do homework and take a short nap before reporting back to the RCMA office. He credits his perseverance to his days working in the fields from a young age through high school.

Reflecting on those years, he shared that each day after school, he worked in the watermelon shed. The work could be exhausting, especially as his shift ran from after school to late nights and often to early morning. But it taught him how to overcome struggles, worries, and fears. He knew he wanted more out of life than working in that watermelon shed.

There was no fancy farm equipment for harvesting watermelon. Every single watermelon was inspected and harvested by hand to ensure that the fruit was ready to eat. Farmworkers looked for a pale yellow "belly" on the bottom of the watermelon, which indicated ripeness. Once cut from the vine, watermelons were literally tossed by hand down a line of farmworkers into semi-trucks and then taken to the shed where he worked with a team again inspecting, washing, and carefully placing the melons on a conveyor belt for preparation and shipping.

While waiting for the trucks to arrive, Facundo would do his homework. Each night, he returned home to a trailer filled with eight siblings and his parents.

Entering his senior year of high school, his father lost his job, and they could no longer afford to pay the mortgage. One day, his mother and father were sitting outside when he returned home. His father asked him to quit school and help him pay the mortgage. But his mother was against the idea and said, quite firmly, "No, he's going to college." She saw the value in education.



Michael adds final touches to designs for RCMA's state-of-the-art, K-8 Dual Language charter school planned for Mulberry, FL.

LASTING LESSONS FROM MOM AND DAD

Throughout his life, both parents did their best to instill a good work ethic in their son, telling him he could do anything with hard work and education. Academics were important to his mother, who knew her son was smart and talented. She told him he was not going to work out in the fields - he was going to study and find something better.

THE HELPING HANDS IN A CAREER PATH TO ARCHITECTURE

From an early age, Facundo knew he was meant to be an architect. He built elaborate treehouses as a youngster, knowing in his heart that someday he would be an architect. As destiny would have it, a trusted acquaintance of Michael's mother happened to be an architect. Upon learning this, she arranged a time for him to meet her son. At that meeting, Michael learned what steps he would need to take to enter an architecture program.

Michael also strongly credits his then supervisor, Ted Hoffman, for giving him the opportunity to learn architectural design and construction on the job. He also allowed Michael the flexibility to commute several days per week to Fort Lauderdale to earn his degree. Today, he and Hoffman own Hoffman and Facundo Architects. Together, they have designed and built several child development centers and are currently working on the \$14 million construction of a new charter school in Mulberry.

As a first-generation college graduate, Facundo said, "I was fortunate that RCMA recognized and encouraged me to develop my talents. So, I always encourage young people to seek employment opportunities here, because they have a far better chance of realizing their full potential."

He adds, "Stay focused and do not let anyone tell you that you cannot achieve your vision. Find your inner strength to keep on until you see your dreams come true."

GOLF CLASSIC RAISES FUNDS AND RECOGNIZES VOLUNTEER

RCMA hosted the 21st Annual Lipman Family Farms Golf Classic in May. It was a beautiful day, players had a lot of fun, and the fundraising event was a great success. With 31 companies and organizations sponsoring the event, RCMA was able to raise more than \$92,000 to benefit the children and families of RCMA.

During the event, RCMA gave out the first annual Brad Young in Service to Children & Families Award (Brad Young Award). The award memorializes the contributions of Brad Young, who played a central role in developing and maintaining the golf tournament. "He loved the RCMA team and was always so proud of the children, too," explained Patti Young as she shared insights about her late husband, Brad. "Let's play golf," he would say, "and turn our dollars into many more dollars."



This year's winning team, Gargiulo, Inc., gathers for a group photo (left to right) John Hudspeth, Joseph Procacci III, J.M. Procacci and Ryan Laude.



Bill Ferrari and his wife Marianne Ferrari

This year, Bill Ferrari, was selected as the first recipient of the Brad Young Award. A donor and volunteer for over 13 years, and a board member for 12, Bill embodies philanthropy. "Prior to my retirement from Tropicana, I volunteered at RCMA and that changed everything," Bill said. He realized that "RCMA is key to the agriculture labor force in Florida," he said.

According to FloridaHealth.gov, today, Florida has one of the largest agricultural workforces in the country led by over 150,000 to 200,000 hard-working farm workers. "By taking care of their kids, connecting families to healthcare and immigration assistance, RCMA brings stability to farmworkers, their communities, their agricultural employers and the food system as a whole," he said.

With his love for RCMA's mission, Bill continues to tutor and mentor students at the Wimauma Community Academy. Through meaningful conversations with the students and their families, he often finds ways to help students become better in school while working with them to make something extraordinary happen.

"It is heartwarming to see children move beyond RCMA to high school, college and successful careers," he added. In fact, Bill keeps in touch with RCMA alumnus, Alfredo Hinojoza Gonzalez, who is now serving in the U.S. Navy at the Submarine Home Base in Connecticut.

"We support RCMA because we see how proud the families are when their kids have a better chance in life. That is meaningful to us."

18

Teams

31

Sponsors

\$92,402.45

Gross funds raised for RCMA



Children and families benefit from Wish Farms' Fundraiser: **PixieRock!**

RCMA RAISED FUNDS DURING THE SILENT AUCTION

Kudos to Wish Farms, an international grower and year-round marketer of strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries, which celebrated the grand opening of its new headquarters with a music festival called PixieRock! in April.

“RCMA was honored to be invited to organize and host a silent auction, which raised nearly \$42,000,” added RCMA Executive Director Isabel Garcia. “This was a night of great music, great food, and a wonderful celebration to raise funds to help families and children where funds are most needed.”

Hundreds of guests flocked to the socially distant outdoor event on Wish Farms' front lawn. The concert featured live performances by Giselle Gutierrez, Atlanta Rhythm Section, BlackHawk and headliner, Young the Giant.

Additionally, PixieRock! generated a diverse group of forty-five corporate and individual sponsors from central Florida. They ranged from local businesses to agriculture industry leaders raising funds for Wish Farms' new foundation. These donations will be put to work supporting causes that represent the three pillars of giving for the Wish Farms Family Foundation: Food Insecurity, Youth Education, and Community.



All RCMA staff in attendance at PixieRock! were fully vaccinated before attending.

FLORIDA FRUIT & VEGETABLE ASSOCIATION (FFVA) SUPPORTS RCMA'S MISSION

“Florida agriculture is heavily dependent upon migrant workers, and farmers are grateful for RCMA's work with migrant workers and their children,” explained Sonia Tighe, FFVA's Director of Membership and RCMA Board member. That's why each class of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program includes in its curriculum a tour of an RCMA center.

“Training a new generation to take on philanthropy is key,” she added. “Understanding their community is important. By supporting groups like RCMA in addressing the needs of farmworkers and their families, everyone prospers.” They are then tasked to undertake a service project to help farmworker families served by RCMA. Those projects have included clothing and food drives in the past, and in 2021 resulted in the delivery of an entire busload of food to one of RCMA's Hillsborough County centers.

Equally impressive, the FFVA Foundation participates each year in the RCMA Christmas Card project to raise money through the sale of holiday cards designed by RCMA students. Each year, businesses from all over Florida purchase thousands of cards and have the option of purchasing a design that is exclusively theirs!

In 2021, every dollar raised through card sales will benefit our Mulberry Charter School Capital Campaign.





RING THE bell
the difference
 Mulberry Charter School



Building schools that build dreams.

Capital Campaign for the Mulberry Charter School



For more information on “Ring the Bell: Be the Difference,” visit the campaign website at RCMA.org/RingTheBell



OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITIES

Christmas
CARDS
 2021
 DESIGNED BY RCMA KIDS



Ricky drew the Three Wise men as a seventh-grader at RCMA Wimauma Community Academy, where his favorite subject is art. When he grows up, he wants to be an architect or a businessman. When he’s not at school, he will either be playing sports or doing homework. His parents work at a plant nursery.

RCMA provides quality early childhood programs, education, and support services to rural low-income children, ages infant through eighth grade. Using a thematic and integrative approach, RCMA focuses early on language and math while increasing self-esteem and social skills.

Brighten a child’s future by purchasing our students’ personally crafted holiday cards. Send a message to these creative students by purchasing these touching Christmas cards.

Proceeds from this year’s sales will be included in the Ring the Bell: Be the Difference capital campaign to build a state-of-the-art Dual Language K-8 school in Mulberry, FL. Your support elevates resources and holistic development for hundreds of children and families.

These kids appreciate your support!

Go to: <https://bit.ly/2Xwyf6I> to view these wonderful holiday renditions.

Contact Sonia Tighe at: sonia.tighe@ffva.com or call (321) 214-5245 to inquire about our special “Exclusive” orders with personalized photos, logos and greetings.

Deadline is December 13, 2021



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Immokalee, FL 34142

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Summer 2021 newsletter

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