

HISTORIC FIRST DAY CELEBRATED AT MCA

While the parents and students may not have realized it on that first day, but history has been made in Mulberry, Florida as RCMA debuted their newest school, Mulberry Community Academy (MCA). The first day of classes was met with a few challenges as the official Academy space was not yet ready to receive students. Teachers and students worked in a beautiful interim space that featured four classrooms for 80 students, bathrooms and an office area. Even though the Academy classrooms weren't quite ready yet, that didn't deter the students from assembling in their temporary classrooms and began the school year with hopes and dreams of a successful academic year.

UPDATE: work on new classrooms is complete, and we have finally moved the students into their new classrooms!

"What a historic day for RCMA," said Isabel Garcia, Executive Director for RCMA. "When you see the little ones come to school for the first time, you can see they're not quite sure what to expect. But as soon as they start to make new friends, these kids are ready to learn! And for the parents, you can see the pride in their eyes, as well as relief, knowing that their children will be taken care of and are able to begin a journey towards a brighter future. For me, it's the best feeling in the world!"

MCA is RCMA's third charter school, with additional charter schools in Immokalee and Wimauma. RCMA is Florida's largest nonprofit provider of quality early childhood education and is a nationally recognized charter school operator. RCMA serves people in rural areas living in poverty, primarily migrant and agricultural working families.



RCMA CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS FOSTERING DREAMS IN EVERY CHILD

Imagine walking into a bustling preschool classroom, a space intentionally designed to optimize the development of young minds, filled with colorful decorations, interactive puzzles and toys, laughter, and the energetic hum of curious young minds. At the heart of this vibrant environment are our children – who benefit from amazing, experienced and dedicated RCMA staff. Their expertise and commitment set the stage for a nurturing educational atmosphere, fostering the growth and kindergarten readiness of our preschoolers. Such is the scene at the RCMA Child Development Centers across the state, where RCMA provides quality child care, education, and resources for some of Florida’s most vulnerable children and their families.

If you visit one of these centers, you’ll find either a stand alone or a cluster of cheerful buildings, painted in vibrant colors that mirror the spirit of the children who frequent them. Laughter echoes through the halls and playground, where the kids form a patchwork community woven from various backgrounds. While their parents toil under the sun, picking fruits and vegetables that grace tables far and wide, these young minds are free to learn and dream. Their teachers benefit too from the wide eyes and open minds that the newborns and toddlers have as they become part of the RCMA family.

RCMA continues to be a beacon of light in the lives of migrant farmworker families. With each passing day, it serves as a testament to the enduring power of education, reminding everyone that no matter where they came from, every child deserves a chance to grow and thrive in a world of color, joy, and dreams.



RCMA CELEBRATES HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

RCMA Centers throughout the state spent the month of September 15 – October 15 celebrating the accomplishments of Hispanics throughout the world. Students were able to learn more about their own culture as well as the culture of other Hispanic countries around the world. Here are some of the highlights.



SMILES ARE BRIGHTER AT RCMA

While most people will dread a trip to the dentist, kids from RCMA are smiling ear to ear, thanks to a group of dental students from the University of Florida.

For the past five years, members of the Dental Outreach team from the University of Florida dedicate their time and expertise to make a significant impact on the well-being of the children served at RCMA's Immokalee campus. Since the families of many of these kids may not be able to afford regular trips to the dentist, the services that the UF students provide are truly appreciated.

Many of the RCMA staff admire the commitment the students have in helping the students improve their oral health. The screenings not only improve the immediate dental health of the children but also raise awareness about the importance of dental care and hygiene in the surrounding community.

"I was also moved by the caring and compassionate way that they treat the children," said Arely Guzman, a Health Worker for RCMA. "They were all highly patient with the kids, and always want to help each child feel comfortable and ready for their dental screening. It puts a smile on my face watching the whole process take place! These students were also very creative in providing the children a hands-on activity of how to brush their teeth properly."

RCMA warmly thanks the University of Florida Dental Outreach Team for their dedication and service to the children of RCMA. Their commitment to addressing disparities in dental care access is commendable and truly inspirational.



THE CASTANEDA'S: A FAMILY UNITED

Alvaro Castaneda is a dedicated husband and father of seven, working hard to support his family. In 2017, personal issues caused Alvaro's wife Reyna to have to leave the home, forcing Alvaro to take care of the family on his own. The children, two still in diapers, were without their mom, and Alvaro was without his wife. With stresses mounting, having to take care of his family, keeping a roof over their heads, and feeding his family, Alvaro reached out to RCMA. Staffs at both the Child Development Center and the Academy were able to look after and educate his children while he continued to work.

But just when everything seemed to be coming together, another unexpected turn of events would find Alvaro heading to jail on an old warrant and his children without either parent. While in the care of their aunt (with five children of her own), the RCMA Immigration Team came to the defense of Alvaro, successfully pleading his case at the Miami immigration court, saving Alvaro from the jaws of deportation and uniting him with his children. The team were also able to obtain dual citizenship for the children and a work permit for Alvaro which helped him secure a higher paying job to better support his family.

Today, Alvaro continues to work hard at his job, while his wife Reyna is back with the family, watching her children thrive in school, with two receiving scholarships for private school and college. There are still many challenges that the Castaneda's have to overcome, but with the support of family, the community and RCMA, they shall endure.



RCMA RECEIVES GRANT FROM HURRICANE IAN RECOVERY INITIATIVE

The effects of Hurricane Ian, which impacted the state of Florida a year ago, are still being felt today. But thanks to a special grant from the Hurricane Ian Recovery Initiative, funded by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, several RCMA support staff members were able to get their lives back on track. The grant provided \$1,000 each for 32 RCMA staff members at the Child Development Center in DeSoto County. The incentive helped financial recovery for supplies, food, rent/utility assistance, repairs, and other expenses.

The impact of the storm to RCMA in DeSoto County was immediate - all centers were under water, trees were strewn across the playgrounds, and power was slow to be restored. The Arcadia CDC was damaged with broken windows, and roads throughout the city were closed because of flooding. As a result, the centers remained closed for several weeks. The RCMA staff there, eager to return to providing regular services, helped the families they serve recover, ignoring their own needs. As a result, many of the RCMA staffers did not receive the same assistance.

RCMA began in DeSoto County in 1975 with one center, expanding to three centers over the years. Over 120 children ages six weeks to five years old are served by RCMA there, as are 92 families.



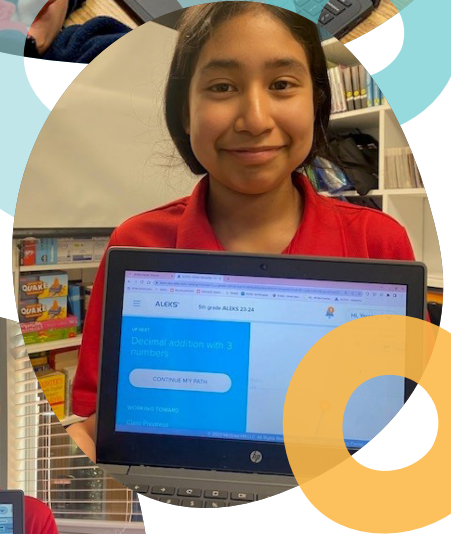
WCA STUDENTS ARE EXCELLING IN MATH THANKS TO ALEKS

When it comes to studying the three R's, reading, writing and arithmetic, most people would say that math can be the most difficult. Thanks to a specialized program offered at RCMA's Wimauma Community Academy (WCA), students are excelling in what was once a troublesome subject.

For nearly ten years, WCA has used ALEKS, a research-based, online learning program that offers course products for several subjects, including math. The program helps educators and parents understand each student's knowledge and learning progress in depth, and provides the individual support required for every student to achieve mastery.

"ALEKS meets scholars at their level," explains Kalynn Viramontes, teacher at MCA. "It presents material they are ready to learn, whether it is remedial basics or challenging above-level math. We use it to encourage scholars to advance through math at their own individual pace, getting them ready for advanced math in middle school."

Students begin using ALEKS in third grade, although some second graders who excel in math have also used the program. Recently, scholars have been competing to see who could complete the most ALEKS skills in one day. It began with Yaretzy H. who came to tutoring and completed a total of 40 ALEKS skills. The next day, Joanna S. beat Yaretzy by completing 42. The following week, Alan E. was named the champion by completing 53 ALEKS skills in a single day, breaking last year's record of 36. Kudos to these amazing scholars!



Christmas CARDS

Designed by RCMA kids

What began twenty-five years ago has blossomed into an annual fundraising event that brings cheer to hundreds of people year after year.

It was 1999, the holiday season fast approaching, and staff members at DUDA, a diversified land company headquartered in central Florida, were considering how to distribute the annual company Christmas cards. Donna Duda, the Director of Corporate Communication & Family Relations, had the idea to turn their company Christmas card into a fundraiser that could help a nonprofit. Thus began a long, artistic relationship between DUDA and RCMA.

"I pitched the idea to my co-worker Susan Howard, and we immediately thought of RCMA," Donna recalls. As the idea spread, Howard reached out to George Sorn, then president of the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association (FFVA) and Chair of the RCMA Board of Directors. He immediately fell in love with the project.

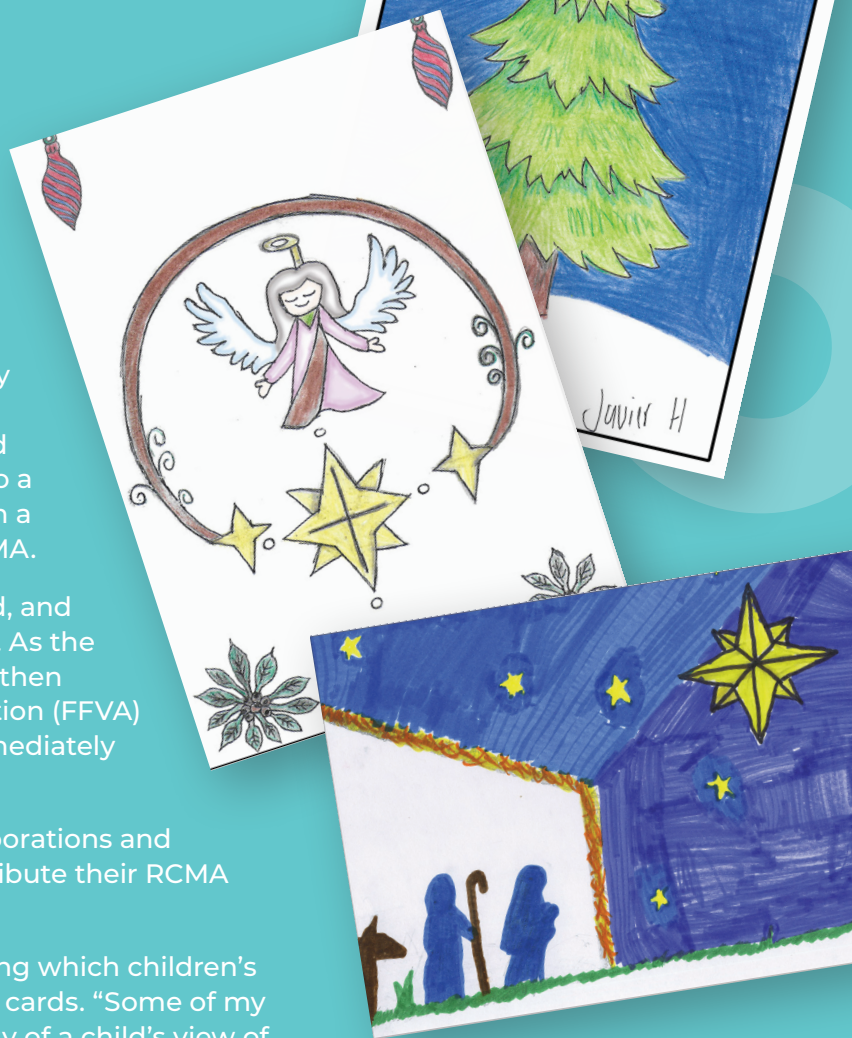
Duda and Howard talked to other agriculture corporations and associations, with several signing on and still distribute their RCMA cards to this day.

Duda is still heavily involved in the project, choosing which children's art entries have the best character for marketable cards. "Some of my favorites are the ones that show the pure simplicity of a child's view of Christmas," she says.

The program would not be as successful as it is without the help of Susan Tighe, also with the FFVA. Since 2006, she has heavily marketed the fundraiser to the many contacts she has in the ag industry, with most of them eager to hear from her every year with the newest selection of cards.

This year's car brochure features cards that can be purchased as exclusives, while others are generic cards that anyone can purchase. Many businesses opt for the exclusive cards that can be customized with a special message to their clients. Variety packs start at just \$15 for ten cards.

The proceeds benefit RCMA kids by with educational materials, supplies, and additional services inspiring high achievements. Every dollar raised qualifies RCMA for matching state funds too. These kids appreciate your support.



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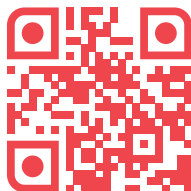
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