

CAUSES



Willie K. Gordon Sr. is pictured with two of the stuffed animals collected by the students from the National Honor Society chapter at Fort Myers High School. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

FROM THE HEART

A Valentine's Day surprise from Fort Myers High School students



Luz Serrano and others were surprised on Valentine's Day.

Special to Fort Myers News-Press USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Residents of Renaissance Preserve Senior Apartments were surprised with stuffed animals, friendly conversation and a lot of laughter to brighten their spirits on Valentine's Day. • The mood-lifting occasion was the result of a partnership between Florida Senior Consulting, Senior Friendship Centers and the National Honor Society chapter at Fort Myers High School. Students collected dozens of new stuffed animals – dogs, cats, teddy bears and cartoon characters – to help curtail feelings of loneliness on the holiday.

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COMMENTARY

Strengthening SWFL through Community Foundation, churches

Michael Chatman
The Community Foundation

In the vibrant tapestry of Southwest Florida, the partnership between The Community Foundation and local churches stands as a testament to the transformative potential when organizations unite for a common purpose. With a shared commitment to uplifting communities, this collaboration embodies the essence of collective impact, leveraging resources, expertise, and networks to foster lasting change. Anchored by mutual respect and a dedication to service, the alliance between The Community Foundation and over 100 churches in the region epitomizes synergy in action.

At the heart of this partnership lies a deep understanding of the unique role churches play as pillars of support and sources of inspiration within their communities. Recognizing the invaluable con-



Matt and Sarah Keller COURTESY PHOTOS



Demmel



Olds



Boyd



Glover

tributions they make to the social fabric, The Community Foundation has cultivated strategic alliances aimed at amplifying their impact and addressing shared challenges. Through a multifaceted approach, encompassing financial support, capacity-building initiatives, and collaborative programs, this partnership nurtures a culture of empowerment and resilience.

One of the primary avenues through which The Community Foundation extends its support to churches is by provid-

ing tailored grant opportunities. These grants serve as catalysts for innovation, enabling churches to expand their outreach initiatives, bolster community engagement efforts, and implement vital programs addressing diverse needs. Whether it's funding for youth mentorship programs, support for food banks, or resources for educational initiatives, these grants empower churches to make a tangible difference in the lives of those they serve.

Beyond financial assistance, The Community Foundation offers access to capacity-building resources designed to enhance their organizational effectiveness and sustainability. From workshops on fundraising strategies to leadership development seminars, these initiatives equip church leaders with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate complex challenges and seize growth opportunities. By

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Save the date for Grande Dames Tea

Special to Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Pace Center for Girls, Lee has announced its 16th annual Grande Dames Tea, taking place from 1-3 p.m. on Thursday, April 18, at Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre, 1380 Colonial Blvd. in Fort Myers.

Each year, Pace’s Grande Dames Tea honors women who exemplify the organization’s guiding principles and have made a significant impact through their roles in business, community and philanthropy. The inspirational event recognizes the unique perspectives and powerful insights that these women have gained throughout their life journeys, and the importance of passing this knowledge along to future generations. With the event’s theme, “The Wisdom of Time – Honoring the Female Spirit,” honorees will share their wisdom during a Q&A session led by the young women of Pace. Guests will also enjoy special performances by the Pace girls, and a

raffle featuring an array of packages from local businesses.

The 16th annual event is co-chaired by Jennifer Nelson and Holly Wilson. The 2024 Grande Dames honorees will be announced in the coming weeks.

“Every year, our Grande Dames Tea shines a light on the incredible journeys of three local women who have broken down walls and enriched their communities,” said Jennifer Cellitti, executive director of Pace Center for Girls, Lee. “Their stories are testaments to the power of female wisdom and the extraordinary impact it has when shared with our young women at Pace who aspire to walk in their footsteps. We are delighted to continue this tradition of empowerment and look forward to sharing the invaluable advice of our esteemed honorees.”

A Friends of Pace table for six is available for \$600. Sponsorship opportunities are available, including Presenting sponsor for \$10,000, Golden Teacup sponsor for



Honorees share their wisdom during a Q&A session led by the young women of Pace at the 2023 event. SUBMITTED

\$7,500, Silver Teacup sponsor for \$5,000, Fascinator sponsor for \$2,500, Silver Teaspoon sponsor for \$1,500 and in-kind sponsorships.

Proceeds from the event benefit Pace Lee and its strength-based programs that guide Pace girls in finding their voice and achieving their potential. Programs are based on the belief that all girls and young

women, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, should be uniquely cared for, supported and encouraged to become the best versions of themselves through a path of healing and recovery.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit PaceCenter.org/Locations/Florida/Lee/2024-Grande-Dames-Tea or call 239-425-2366.

Heart

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“We realize that not everybody has somebody here and they wanted to be able to share the love specifically on Valentine’s Day,” said Elisa Grossman, a special education teacher at Fort Myers High School and adviser to National Honor Society members. “This was the highlight of their day.”

“Being able to take youth in our community and connect them with elders in our community is great for both,” added Scott Miller, founder and CEO of Florida Senior Consulting, which coordinated the surprise along with Senior Friendship Centers. “They can get wisdom from the seniors and the youthful exuberance spills over, and the seniors get all excited about the opportunity to meet with kids.”

Florida Senior Consulting, the state’s largest privately-owned care

management and placement firm, provides expertise in family assistance, case management, education, senior living selection and placement, and ongoing advocacy. Senior Friendship Centers offers services and programs such as adult day services, activity centers, caregiving resources, healthy meals, exercise classes, volunteer opportunities, lifelong learning, support groups, economic assistance and more. Senior Friendship Centers offers a dining program at Renaissance Preserve Senior Apartments, which is managed by The Housing Authority of the City of Fort Myers.

The Valentine’s Day teddy bear surprise was the first initiative between the agencies and school.

“Elder loneliness is a real thing,” Miller said. “Elder isolation is known to be a cause of decline, and having seniors be engaged with people in the community and being supported, feeling like they’re part of something, is vital to their wellness and wellbeing.”



Students collected dozens of new stuffed animals – dogs, cats, teddy bears and cartoon characters – to help curtail feelings of loneliness on the day. SUBMITTED

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