

# RCMA HOY

Redlands Christian Migrant Association

We Can Make  
A World of  
Difference

## Helping Our Youth



April 2003

Issue 120

OUR MISSION: We Open Doors to Opportunities! ¡Abrimos puertas a las oportunidades!

## Fellsmere volunteers at the heart of it!

During a time when the media is filled with news of death and destruction a recent visit to Fellsmere CDC gloriously painted a distinctly different picture about human kind. Three individuals who have passed into those so called "golden years" are not to be found playing bingo, on daily golf outings, or at the senior center. Instead they sought out the opportunity to contribute their time, energy, skills, and resources to improve the lives of farmworker children and their families in Indian River County.

Four years ago, Theresa J. Harrison was picking up a few things at her local Publix supermarket, when she noticed a woman pushing a cart filled with gallons and gallons of milk. Her curiosity got the best of her and she commented to the woman, "Boy, you must have a lot of kids?"

This moment is where Theresa's RCMA volunteer story began. After a lengthy conversation with the RCMA cook who went to Publix to pick-up milk for the children, Theresa was reporting for a volunteer interview & orientation. She made the cut and began volunteering regularly at RCMA's Fellsmere centers. Theresa is impressed with Nettie, who she says is an "excellent teacher".

Theresa enjoys reading to the children, helping to provide structure, and playing outdoors with them. She is most impressed with the warmth of the staff and how appreciative the parents are of the program. Theresa has also spent a large portion of her 50 year marriage volunteering to help veterans with their mental health needs. Her husband is a veteran and several years ago they went to Israel on two occasions. Each time, they roughed it for one month in barracks style housing on base, in order to help.

Betty Saunders began coming to Florida from Boston as an apart time resident in 1988 and moved down full time in 1995 to join her daughter, after becoming a widow. Betty too has a history of volunteering in Boston at the Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of Science and the community library. Betty stumbled on to RCMA during a presentation to the American Association of University Women, of which she is a member. Elida Gomez, area coordinator, the Principal of Fellsmere Elementary and a Fellsmere housing advocate informed the group of

the many needs of the Fellsmere community. She was convinced from the presentation that Fellsmere is where her volunteer services were needed, and RCMA is lucky she chose us. Betty says, "her work at RCMA is the most gratifying volunteer work she has ever done." She volunteers at least two times a week and loves the baby room, but is perfectly willing to help wherever she is needed. Betty who doesn't look a day over 60 is has just signed up for a Spanish class at Indian River Community College at the age of 77. Betty is determined to use her new Spanish language skills to better communicate with staff and children. When asked what she has learned about farmworkers through her work at RCMA she had this to say, "they are forced to live in intolerable conditions, they are good, hardworking honest people who deserve better."

Betty had numerous reflection about the RCMA staff who she works with, "I feel part of a very warm and caring community where people give of themselves." "I feel happier and more relaxed with this group of people than with most of my neighbors and friends." "I'm gaining knowledge of another culture and making lasting friendships." "If I had grandchildren I would pay to have them in this RCMA program." Thanks Betty for the praise, you help us to be who we are.



In case you were thinking that big hearts are only found in caring females, think again. Last, but certainly not least is the young man, who at 74 still has a mischievous twinkle in his eye, a lust for making the lives of others better through his true heart of gold. More than 100 tiny eyes look lovingly at John Krucko as he walks into the classroom of the RCMA center on Pine Street in Fellsmere. "Pizza! Pizza!" they shout out in recognition of the man who brings pizza each month and more importantly shows them love and affection every day.

John knows what it is like to be poor. John comes from

## FROM THE DESK OF BARBARA



“Any question asked in a respectful way is always welcome. The closer we all are in what we think is the truth in RCMA, the stronger the organization will be.”

## DEL ESCRITORIO DE BARBARA

“Cualquier pregunta hecha en una forma respetable es bienvenida. Lo mas cerca, que estemos a lo que pensamos, es la verdad en RCMA, lo mas fuerte que la organización estará. Gracias por preguntar.”

### What is the “truth”?

One of my favorite columnists is Leonard Pitts, Jr. of the Miami Herald. He is an African American male, a father and smart, caring person. Recently he had a column about truth, relating to the war, but which interested me for broader reasons. He wrote about the search for truth often being a subjective thing. What you see depends on where you stand. Many of you have heard me talk about the three blind men describing an elephant based on where they were standing and what part of the elephant they were touching. You can imagine that each one said something different and they were all telling the truth.

In RCMA we try hard to communicate the truth, hoping that information is taken from what is called the “Immokalee Office” to area level staff and then to centers, and the teachers. What hurts us all is when each of us **thinks** we understand what the “truth” is and therefore does not ask questions to make sure we really understand the same thing! I have been told that questioning authority is not culturally acceptable. It is disrespectful to question ones superiors.

I beg you to change that point of view, at least in RCMA. **Any question asked in a respectful way is always welcome.** The closer we all are in what we **think** is the truth in RCMA, the stronger the organization will be. Thank you for asking!

### ¿Que es la “verdad”?

Uno de mis columnistas favoritos es Leonard Pitts, Jr. del periódico Herald de Miami. El es un hombre Afro-americano, un padre de familia, una persona inteligente, y bondadosa. Recientemente escribió un artículo sobre la verdad, en relación a la guerra, pero me intereso por otro amplio razonamiento. El escribió que la búsqueda de la verdad, frecuentemente es una cosa subjetiva. Lo que usted ve depende de donde esta parado. Muchos de ustedes me han escuchado hablar de los tres hombres ciegos describiendo un elefante basado en donde estaban parados y que parte del elefante estaban tocando. Te puedes imaginar, que cada uno dijo algo diferente y todos estaban diciendo la verdad.

En RCMA hacemos todo lo posible para comunicar la verdad, con la esperanza que se lleven la información de lo que llaman la “Oficina de Immokalee” al personal del área, y después a los centros y las maestras. Lo que nos perjudica es cuando cada uno de nosotros **piensa** que entendió lo que es “la verdad” y por lo tanto no hacemos preguntas para asegurarnos que estamos entendiendo la misma cosa. Me dicen que el cuestionar la autoridad no es aceptable culturalmente. Es falta de respecto cuestionar los superiores de uno.

Les pido que cambien este punto de vista, aunque sea solo en RCMA. **Cualquier pregunta hecha en una forma respetable es bienvenida.** Lo mas cerca, que estemos a lo que **pensamos**, es la verdad en RCMA, lo mas fuerte que la organización estará. Gracias por preguntar.

# Indian River teacher first to obtain A.S. degree

Susan Southard began what she thought would be a lifelong career with the telephone company at sixteen years of age. She said, "life sometimes throws you some odd curves." Susan was downsized from the telephone company. Fortunately she had taken advantage of the company tuition assistance program beginning in 1994. She had a few classes under her belt when she was put in the position of determining which direction she would head toward in her professional future. In early 2000 a friend told her about the RCMA Fellsmere center.

She went on a visit and spent the day volunteering at the center. It was that day that sealed Susan's fate, she now knew where she wanted to go in the future. She began working at the RCMA Children's House center in February 2000 and set her sites on obtaining an A.S. degree in Child Development from Indian River Community College.

Her diploma is now en route via the United States Postal Service. It has been six years in the making and Susan believes that what she has learned in class is invaluable to her work with children. "My education has taught me how to observe children, how to react to them, and how to work on setting realistic expectations for them." "It has enabled me to bring back new ideas and share with other teachers."

What Susan enjoys most about children is their innocence and their keen sense of humor. She enjoys watching her Pre-K children progress from the first day they enter her class until they venture into kindergarten. "They're fun and they teach you a great deal."

"As much complaining as I did, especially in Algebra, I have no regrets, it was all worth it."

This 55 year old woman refuses to let the grass grow under her feet. She took what many would consider a bad situation—losing a job, and turned it into a life long opportunity to grow, and to become someone that she is very proud of.

Susan is now planning to take a Spanish class. She wants to be able to communicate with the children when they first come into her class next Fall and may have less exposure to English. After Spanish, she would like to take a computer class. She feels both the language and technology skills are smart choices for the future. "I have never worked so hard in my life and I have no regrets", stated Susan.

After talking with Susan it is easy to see that she

has found just the right match. Susan had this to say to all the teachers out there who are working hard meeting the needs of children and going to school, "Go for it!" Congratulations Susan! We are very proud of you!

## Are we having fun yet?



Rollason Child Development Center in Immokalee has given up junk food for holiday parties and replaced the food with fun, fun, and more fun. Look at the sand box turned South Beach with two avid sunbathers!



Boys pass on the beach and prefer mixing concrete for a construction project!



Those that opted out of water world got a ride on the Easter Bunny buggy! Great job RCDC staff!



Taking a break watching the tide roll in...

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**Volunteers, continued from page 3**

the coal mining region of Pennsylvania, he and his sisters grew up in less than tender-loving-care conditions, and with no children of his own really, John wanted to be part of a child's life. John spends a minimum of three days a week at the center. When he is not there he is taking donated items to a needy family, making Christmas baskets, drumming up new ideas for fundraising, having lunch with a traveling staff from Immokalee or putting a smile on the face of all who are lucky enough to be a part of his broad circle of admirers. John was recently recognized as the volunteer of the year for the Indian River Healthy Start Coalition's Beverly O'Neil annual award. It is clearly not applause or recognition that John seeks, he is just naturally and beautifully in tune to the joy of living and giving. If your center would like to get some ideas on how to increase the number of volunteers in your area please call our resident expert, Elida Gomez, area coordinator at the Indian River Area Office.

**Libromania comes to Immokalee**



**Books...Books...Books...** Representatives from General Mills and the National Council of La Raza have formed a partnership known as Libromania to raise awareness about the importance of reading. The Trix bunny was on hand to present the RCMA Immokalee Community School students, and Board member William Laimbeer (rear) with a \$5,000 check for children's books. Students also received a starter collection of books to encourage family literacy.



**RCMA Rollason Center and School-Age Program Staff got in the volunteer act for the 10th Annual Wendell N. Rollason Scholarship Run. Runners crossed the finish line at the RCMA Immokalee Community School!**

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