



US Rep David Rivera visits 2



RCMA recognized by RIF 3



An appreciative parent 5

RCMA copes with funding cuts

IMMOKALEE – If the politics of 2011 are remembered for anything, it may be the epidemic of government budget-cutting.

RCMA felt some pain, dodged some more – and adapted.

“Ninety percent of our funding comes from the federal and state governments,” said Executive Director Barbara Mainster. “We’ve been through this before.”

When Congress debated the federal debt ceiling in early summer, a key topic was Head Start, the 46-year-old program to prepare the children of low-income families for success in school.

Head Start is RCMA’s largest single funding source and it survived the debt debate unscathed. RCMA will receive \$32.5 million in the current budget year.

Tallahassee was a different story. RCMA’s annual School Readiness contract with the state was reduced to \$12,095,225 from the previous year’s \$12,692,356, a 4.7% cut.

The reductions prompted RCMA to close three childcare centers, bringing the statewide number to 74. The selections were based on financial and enrollment trends. Closed were:

- ◆ **Gadsden Child Development Center** in Quincy, west of Tallahassee. Some local farms, including a large mushroom grower, had ceased or decreased operations, shrinking the number of families who needed RCMA services in Gadsden. RCMA hopes to lease the building to another nonprofit.
- ◆ **Eloise Child Development Center**, south of Winter Haven, where enrollment had dropped. RCMA continues to operate the Wahneta Child Development Center nearby. Staff members obtained transfers to other RCMA centers in the area. RCMA had leased the Eloise building from Polk County.
- ◆ **Dade City Child Development Center**, northeast of Tampa. Farm work has disappeared in central and eastern Pasco County as Tampa’s suburbs spread northward. This center served migrant children transported from Lakeland. RCMA

continues to operate Dade City Learning Center across the street, and it absorbed children and staff from the closed center.

“None of us likes to close centers,” Mainster said. “But I’m very proud of the staff for how these decisions were made and executed.”

In another cost-cutting move, RCMA reduced the number of staff health specialists to eight from the previous 12. The geographic zones served by the specialists were redrawn and enlarged.

And finally, RCMA’s only paid position of volunteer coordinator, a part-time job in Indian River County, was eliminated.

“This was sad and ironic,” Mainster said. “When you are forced to cut payroll, you value volunteers more than ever.”



PHOTO BY: BILL COATS/RCMA

Jamal Felton, 2, at RCMA’s Booker T. Washington Child Development Center in Moore Haven.



PHOTO BY: DAVID ALBERS/MAPLES DAILY NEWS

Jim McDevitt rallied his students during an assembly on the first day of school in August.

PRINCIPAL LEADS A RENAISSANCE

He found a new challenge, then it grew

IMMOKALEE – The news hit on Day 4.

After nine years as an elementary-school principal in affluent suburbs of Denver, Jim McDevitt decided to move across the country to run RCMA’s Immokalee Community School, filled with the children of low-income farmworkers.

McDevitt met his young, idealistic faculty at a four-day training retreat in August 2010. They buzzed with plans for the new school year.

Then, on the retreat’s last day, the State of Florida published school-by-school FCAT scores. Immokalee Community School became the only “F” school in Collier County.

“It was painful,” said Maria Jimenez, Director of Charter Schools for RCMA. “There were tears of anger, tears of frustration, tears of how, how could this be?”

RCMA reaches out to Congress

IMMOKALEE – Fourth-grader Perla Ramirez was shy but determined. She looked at her congressman and asked, “Did you ever have to take the state test, the FCAT?”

No, replied U.S. Rep. **David Rivera**, on a visit to Immokalee Community School in April. He took other assessment tests, he said.

And so it went as the first-term Republican toured the charter school and a Migrant Head Start center, both operated by Redlands Christian Migrant Association.

RCMA invited the Miami congressman to enjoy an updated look at the federal Head Start program via RCMA. In the current fiscal year, RCMA is receiving \$32.5 million from Head Start, our largest single source of funds. Head Start was a focal point in budget debates this year, but it was not cut.

“IT’S A WONDERFUL PROGRAM YOU’VE PUT TOGETHER HERE,”

DAVID RIVERA

In the midst of such discussions, RCMA reached out last spring to Rivera and a dozen other members of Congress whose districts contain RCMA facilities. Rivera and staffers from three other Congressional offices accepted invitations to tour RCMA facilities:

- ◆ **Diana McGee**, the Fort Myers-based regional director for U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, visited the Immokalee Community Migrant Head Start Center and Immokalee Community School.
- ◆ **Carlye Morgan**, education policy aide to U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor of Tampa, toured RCMA’s Palmetto Child Development Center, south of Tampa.
- ◆ **Clint Shoupe**, the Plant City-based field representative for U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, spent most of a morning at RCMA’s Dover Child Development Center southeast of Tampa. Bilirakis, a Republican, represents a suburban district that loops around the northern and eastern side of Tampa Bay.

Rivera, whose district stretches from Miami to eastern Naples,



PHOTO BY: DANIEL FELL/RCMA

Twenty-month-old Fredi Mijangos looks for moral support as he meets his congressman, Rep. David Rivera of Miami at Immokalee Community Migrant Head Start in April. Rivera attended a Head Start program as a child.

personally attended a Head Start program as a child. He said he was impressed by RCMA. “It’s a wonderful program you’ve put together here,” Rivera told Barbara Mainster, RCMA’s executive director.

At the community school, Rivera asked several dozen fourth-graders how many spoke Spanish. About half raised their hands. He told the students he gives speeches and media interviews in English and Spanish. “The Spanish language is a very important part of my district,” he said.

RCMA kids recover stolen savings bonds

The eight years are a mystery, mostly. But somehow, Beulah Moree’s flowered purse traveled from the clutches of a purse-snatcher in West Palm Beach to the probing fingers of children in RCMA’s Smith Brown Child Development Center in Arcadia.

That was when the 12 U.S. Savings Bonds began slipping out.

Gloria Kendrick, RCMA’s area coordinator in Arcadia, said the purse arrived last April in a large load of second-hand clothes brought by a donor from Sarasota. They spent a few months in a storage room before staff members began sorting them. They took purses and other items to dress-up corners in the childcare centers. Moree’s purse, and three others, were hung on a rack in the classroom of Bernice Ridley, who teaches 3- and 4-year-olds.



Gloria Kendrick

One August morning, children started playing with the purses. Ridley noticed two children pretending to spend and fold money.

“I saw something that looked like money,” Ridley said.

A child had unzipped a side pocket of Moree’s purse, and pulled out a savings bond. So did another child. Ten more bonds rested inside. Together, they were worth \$300.

Ridley passed them up the RCMA chain of command.

Initially Kendrick was pessimistic about finding the owner. Some of the bonds had been bought in the 1960s. They had matured decades ago.

“I assumed she was dead, or in a nursing home, or something like that,” Kendrick said.

But a web search hit home on the second address. Moree, now 88, was alive in Palm Beach Gardens – with a phone number.

“I said, ‘Oh my God!’” Kendrick said. “I was so excited.”

Yet on the phone, Moree became confused and suspicious.

“I didn’t know what to think,” she said later. “It kind of shocked me. It was kind of a miracle for somebody to be that honest.”

Moree had lost her purse in 2003 as she left a supermarket in West Palm Beach. A young man jumped from a car and grabbed Moree’s purse from the top rack of the grocery cart, she said. Moree tried to pull the purse back, but fell to the pavement. She headed for a hospital while the thief escaped.

Within hours, Moree’s credit card was used at a local Burdines, she said.

That was the last clue she heard about the purse, until Kendrick called in August. A few days after Kendrick’s phone call, Moree’s confusion evaporated: her savings bonds arrived in the mail.

“To me,” she said, “it’s a miracle.”

Reading program lauds RCMA as “dedicated, passionate and inspiring”



PHOTO BY: RCMA

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the nation’s largest children’s literacy nonprofit, named RCMA as the national Program of the Month for August.

At RCMA’s 80 locations throughout Florida, RIF provides 5,500 children of migrant farm workers and rural, low-income families with books and motivational literacy activities. Each site promotes the importance of family and community engagement at book distributions by encouraging local librarians, politicians, public school teachers, law enforcement officers, firefighters and other community members to participate.

Coming now, the honor is bittersweet, because Congress eliminated \$24.8 million in federal funding for RIF this fiscal year. As a result, RIF’s ability to continue providing free books to the children most at risk of academic failure is in serious jeopardy. This could be the last year of RIF’s Books for Ownership program.

However, RCMA’s Penny Norton is optimistic that literacy services can be sustained.

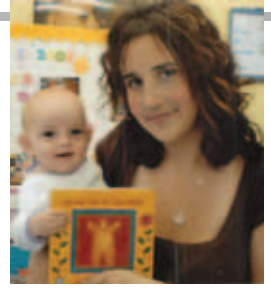
“RCMA is committed to continuing a literacy program for both children and parents,” said Norton. “Private donors and other non-profit agencies like the Mexican Consulate have made donations in the past and we hope to be able to depend on them in the future.”

Carol H. Rasco, president and CEO of RIF, described RCMA’s use of RIF as “dedicated, passionate and inspiring.”

“Ms. Norton and the entire staff at RCMA bring admirable enthusiasm to the program and we are thankful for their commitment to improving literacy for children, families, and communities.”

RIF motivates children to read by working with them, their parents, and community members to make reading a fun and beneficial part of everyday life. RIF’s highest priority is reaching underserved children from birth to age 8. Through community volunteers in every state and U.S. territory, RIF provided 4 million children with 15 million new, free books and literacy resources last year.

RIF launched its Program of the Month to honor local programs that fulfill RIF’s mission, which relies on innovative programs promoting children’s literacy.



“Change of pace” from inmates to toddlers

MOORE HAVEN – Rosezita Rawls read *When Mama Comes Home Tonight* slowly and patiently, tolerating the interruptions. With every turn of a page, 2-year-olds leaned against Rawls’ knees, poked the book with fingers and blurted out comments.

Rawls didn’t mind at all. Most of the time, her students are prison inmates at Moore Haven Correctional Facility, taking Rawls’ adult basic education class or a literacy class.

But on Wednesday mornings, the action moves to RCMA’s Booker T. Washington Child Development Center, when prison staff members arrive to read to the children.

The visits started earlier this year after Center Coordinator Jenny Rich called Warden Laura Bedard with an invitation. Bedard toured the center, with its 50 children, and liked what she saw. Back at the medium-security prison, Bedard encouraged her employees to sign up for reading visits.

Inmates don’t visit. But Rich said she has heard that two, with artistic talents, are working on an art piece for the childcare center.

The reading has turned into a treat for adults and kids.

“They’re enjoying books more,” said Mentor Teacher Sherri Elrod. “They see that other people care about them besides their parents and their teachers.”

“I enjoy working with children,” Rawls said. “I taught in the public schools for 27 years... It’s a nice change of pace to get to come back and be with the little ones.”



PHOTO BY: BILL COATS/RCMA

Two-year-olds react as Rosezita Rawls, from Moore Haven Correctional Facility, reads them a book, *When Mama Comes Home Tonight*.

Your web search can help RCMA



Goodsearch.com is a charity-minded search engine on the Internet. It donates 50 percent of its advertising revenue to nonprofits designated by its users. RCMA recently registered with Goodsearch as one of those nonprofits.

Goodsearch estimates that every web search you conduct through its browser generates a penny for your designated charity. Products ordered via the Goodsearch website generate much more.

Please visit www.goodsearch.com, adopt it as your search engine and designate RCMA as your nonprofit.



PHOTO BY: BILL COATS/RCMA

Lunch at Wimauma Academy

Plans crystallize for “RCMA Leadership Academy”

WIMAUMA – The plans for an RCMA middle school on the campus of Wimauma Academy have grown bigger and better this year.

The middle school has been named RCMA Leadership Academy.

“In addition to academic rigor, we believe the school will produce leaders, young leaders who will excel in high school,” said Barbara Mainster, RCMA’s Executive Director.

“RESEARCH SHOWS

THAT – CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY – STUDENTS TEND TO DECIDE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL WHETHER THEY WILL EVENTUALLY DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL,” SAID MARIA JIMENEZ, RCMA’S DIRECTOR OF CHARTER SCHOOLS. “WE WANT THEM GOING TO OUR SCHOOL, DOING WELL AND MAKING PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.”

unconsciously – students tend to decide in middle school whether they will eventually drop out of high school,” said Maria Jimenez, RCMA’s Director of Charter Schools. “We want them going to our school, doing well and making plans for high school and college.”

At capacity, Leadership Academy will hold 132 students, or two classes of 22 children in each grade. Wimauma Academy will maintain an enrollment of 188.

When school began in August, 35 sixth-graders began classes at Wimauma Academy instead of enrolling in area middle schools. They are the first students of Leadership Academy.

You can donate online to the campaign to build the new RCMA Leadership Academy (or to other RCMA programs). Go to www.rcma.org/help.

A capital campaign committee is working to raise \$3.3 million to add the middle school at the Wimauma Academy campus south of Tampa. More than \$1.25 million has been raised. In August, RCMA hired Ronna Kennedy, a development consultant from Tampa, to coordinate the home stretch of the campaign.

Groundbreaking is tentatively scheduled for December or January.

Wimauma Academy has established a strong track record of teaching, while respecting the Hispanic culture of its students. They have earned the school six “A” grades over eight years of FCAT tests. But school leaders have worried that the culture shock of public middle schools has tended to derail the students’ success – and zeal for education.

“Research shows that – consciously or

COMMUNITY SCHOOL

continued from page 1

Everyone there, including McDevitt, knew the “F” threatened the school’s charter, its right to operate.

“It was like, wow!” he says now. “Everybody’s job is going to be on the line.”

He reassured the group that he had revived struggling schools before.

“I knew that I wanted a challenge,” McDevitt says. “But this was even more of a challenge.”

Low-income students commonly struggle in school. Their modest home lives provide fewer learning experiences than in affluent households. And at Immokalee Community School, many of the students speak English as their second language.

But McDevitt attacked such thinking. These children were capable of matching their suburban peers, he argued. The school would teach and test them relentlessly, and celebrate every success.

He promptly:

- ◆ Lengthened the school day by 40 minutes and devoted the time to math instruction.
- ◆ Ordered that students be tested in math at least weekly.
- ◆ Created a “Math Masters” board in the cafeteria, to carry photographs of high-scoring math students.
- ◆ Marshaled support staff, after-school teachers and volunteers to provide one-on-one reading instruction, at least 15 minutes every day, for 50 struggling students.
- ◆ Personally observed and mentored the teachers.
- ◆ Used the school’s mascot – dragons – and the theme of fire to rally the kids.

After the testing regimen began, a teacher posted a class-by-class list of average math scores near the teacher mailboxes. The list mysteriously vanished. But the teacher persisted, and the weekly list became standard reading. Low-scoring teachers huddled with high-scoring teachers for advice. Test scores slowly rose.

“Teachers worked hard – really, really hard,” Jimenez said. “Jim gave them incredible confidence in themselves.”

New FCAT scores, which arrived late in June, affirmed the work. Immokalee Community had risen from the F to a C. Its scores showed the greatest improvement of any Collier County school. Immokalee Community’s third graders posted the second-highest math scores of any third-grade group in the county.

When school resumed recently, everyone went to work to improve on the C. But the first days of school were different this time. Television and newspaper teams visited to spread the news of success.

“The kids believe in themselves,” McDevitt said. “The momentum is there. The fire is being started.”

Harvest of hate against migrants

The following column was published in July by the *St. Petersburg Times*, *Miami Herald* and *Tampa Tribune*.

The children of Florida's migrant farmworkers live a particularly rugged life. Their impoverished parents spend winters here, as long as they can find work among the tomatoes, strawberries, cucumbers, peppers and melons. Then they head north every spring, to harvest sweet potatoes, blueberries and tomatoes in the Carolinas, cucumbers in the Midwest, apples and cherries in the northeast.



Barbara Mainster
Executive Director

The migration is particularly hazardous this year, thanks to politics.

In June, a family served by one of our childcare centers set off for Ohio. They had heard frightening news about Georgia's new immigration law, and decided to drive through Georgia at night. They didn't get that far.

After midnight, a Florida state trooper stopped their van on Interstate 75, alleging its headlights were dim. A search of the van turned up false identification papers that undocumented immigrants must use to obtain work here. After several hours on the shoulder of I-75, the parents were jailed for a week in Gainesville.

Their sons – English-speaking American citizens ages 5 and 7 – were whisked away to foster care.

The State of Florida was protecting us from – what?

Farm jobs stolen from U.S.-born workers? Latino farmworkers bring picking skills honed since adolescence. They are acclimated to the miseries of the fields. Few Americans have learned this work, and none are raised for it. Witness the desperate search for native-born pickers in Georgia, where the new immigration crackdown scared away a 10th of all farmworkers before it even took effect.

Criminals? These parents are tireless workers and regular church-goers in the farm community of Wimauma. They have been active, responsible parents at our Beth-El Child Development Center. They are "illegal" immigrants because: 1. They sought to work their way out of poverty; and 2. U.S. law since 1964 has made it virtually impossible for unskilled workers to legally enter the U.S., even though our economy requires millions of them.

The American story is a parade of immigrants who arrived poor, worked hard and assimilated successfully. They too were scorned at first, and that worsened whenever the economy weakened.

But never in my life have politicians exploited this discord as they do today. For the sake of votes, a swelling tide of hate is engulfing immigrants.

In writing this, I'm sure I invite this hate onto myself and my organization. But it's time for people of conscience to speak up. Some of the ugliest stains on our nation's history resulted when one great swath of society declared open season on another. That's what I feel happening today.

The only rational solution is for Congress to create a method through which immigrants can register, pay penalties, learn English and work legally.

Meanwhile, the Wimauma parents are free on \$1,000 bail each, charged with a package of felonies. They have spent the summer in Maryland, which seemed to be friendlier. Their legal cases are pending.

But the little U.S. citizens in the family have been traumatized by their own government. Returned to their mother, they covet her embrace. Both panic at the sight of a police car. And the 7-year-old is afraid to be anywhere near an interstate highway.

A MOM'S LETTER

RCMA is a great place!

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter in regard to my daughter's day care facility. Kelsey has been going there for about a year now.

The staff at her daycare are unbelievable, awesome and very good to my daughter. She even begs to go to school on the weekends. Ms. Latoya and Ms. Susan have taught her soooo many things, it is unreal what she knows and can do. She can sing just about every nursery rhyme on the planet and write her first and last name. She knows her colors and is working on numbers. She also can say her birthday and her address. She is becoming bilingual in English and Spanish. She just turned 4. I could go on.

I have three children and have lived in this community my whole life. My children have been to different day care facilities. This is our first time with RCMA.

The center is always clean and the children are always happy. When I pick my daughter up, you always see a staff member playing with the children. I have often seen Ms. Susan playing on the playground with the children and much more, and Ms. Latoya reading to the children and much more, and not just sitting around waiting for time to go by. You can tell they truly enjoy what they do.

I wish I could take them with us all the way through high school. My daughter is so smart because of the great staff they have. They also communicate with the parents and let us know of any community events coming up.

To sum it up, RCMA is a great place! They run a tight ship when it comes to laws and rules, but they sure set sail with the children that they take care of every day. I am thankful every day that my daughter is a student there. Every teacher there, including Ms. Laura the director, has been wonderful to Kelsey.

Ms. Susan and Ms. Latoya have a true gift in teaching! Not only have they touched my daughter's heart, but mine too!

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Debbie Cobb

Debbie Cobb, a medical laboratory technician, lives in Vero Beach. Kelsey attends RCMA's Children's House Child Development Center in nearby Wabasso.



Debbie and Kelsey Cobb.

PHOTO BY: SUSAN SOUTHWARD/RCMA



Fall News

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 402 West Main Street / Immokalee, Florida 34142
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Share Christmas joy through a child's art

Every year, RCMA children draw their visions of the holidays, and we convert those into Christmas cards. Each card tells about the child artist. **A 10-CARD PACKAGE SELLS FOR \$15 – MONEY THAT QUALIFIES RCMA FOR \$240 IN STATE MATCHING FUNDS!**

You can download the brochure online at www.rcma.org/holidaycards, and send in the order form. Or you can call RCMA's Judy Brill at **(800) 282-6540, ext. 242**.



on the move

Early RCMA work hooked him on education

TAMPA – “I remember riding my tricycle under the shade of the trees,” says Ansberto Vallejo with a smile. “I remember the faces of the ladies that took care of us.

“Sometimes we would have ice cream, and that was pretty special.”



Ansberto Vallejo

As Vallejo grew older, new RCMA influences joined his preschool memories from the Wimauma Child Development Center. He landed a job while in college, tutoring elementary school children in an RCMA after-school program.

“That really opened up my eyes,” he said. “It played a critical role as to what I wanted to study and major in.”

Ever since, Vallejo has devoted his career to helping children. He earned a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of South Florida

and immediately returned to East Bay High School, where he had graduated, as a drop-out prevention specialist.

In a few years, he started a mentoring program to acquaint Latin and migrant students with USF students, in hopes of heightening Hispanic/Latino interest in college. Three-fourths of the first class went on to college.

In 2004, Vallejo's fellow teachers nominated him for minority educator of the year. He became a guidance counselor, then head of East Bay's guidance department.

Today, he lives in Riverview with his wife, Alma – also an RCMA alum and a teacher – and their three daughters.

For three years, Vallejo has been Supervisor of Academic Programs in the School District's Tampa headquarters.

It's a continuation of his personal mission to educate young people. Vallejo's operation, which affects 8,500 middle- and high-school students in the school system, identifies average students who show potential to do better. The program pushes them to take on more rigorous course work.

“There are a lot of programs for the kids who are struggling, and then there are the gifted programs at the other end,” he said. “This is for the academic middle students.”