

BeCAUSE They Care: Nonprofits in the news

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Naples Equestrian Challenge appoints board members

Naples Equestrian Challenge recently appointed three new members to its 2015 board of directors. Jeanne Dalessando, Dr. Bonny Eads-Dery and Pat Neale join returning board members President Dr. William Swartz, Past President Kyle Christianson, Vice-President Connie Sharpe, Secretary Dr. Ronald Riner, and Treasurer Tim O'Neil along with Joseph Basile, Dr. Junee Gardy, Dr. Virginia Condello, LeeAnn Kirwin, Michele Harrison, Tiffany MacNiven Lehman, and Hillary Raines Wilson.

Dalessando is the former marketing director of IPC Capital Group and recently retired from Datasearch NY, Inc. in Naples. She holds a bachelor of science degree in operations management from the University of Vermont. In addition to serving on the board, Dalessando volunteers every week at NEC exercising horses and working as a leader and side walker for Friday sessions.

Eads-Dery has been practicing optometry in Naples since 1971. She has served many organizations including the American Academy of Optometry, the Southwest Florida Optometric Association, Girl Scouts of Gulf Coast Florida, Sunrise Tech of Collier and the Marco Island Lions Club. She also serves on NEC's Governance Committees.

Neale is an attorney practicing in the areas of foreclosure prevention and defense, bankruptcy, land use, contractor, real estate, zoning and governmental and administrative law. He is also president and owner of Lucera, Inc., a distribution, marketing and consulting firm. Neale has served in leadership positions for several local nonprofits including the United Way of Collier County, Marco Island YMCA, Youth Haven, Leadership Collier Foundation and the Marco Island Chamber of Commerce.

Established in 1995, Naples Equestrian Challenge, is a nonprofit 501 (c) 3 organization with the mission to improve the lives of children and adults with special needs through therapeutic riding and other equine-related programs.

For information, visit NaplesEquestrianChallenge.org.

Jennifer's April Fashion Forward Friday to benefit Our Mother's Home

Jennifer's women's boutique is celebrating 32 years in business by giving back to local charities at "Fashion Forward Friday" events. Our Mother's Home will receive 5 percent of all sales from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on April 10. Shoppers will enjoy champagne and cupcakes and will receive 15 percent off all shoes.

"Our Mother's Home addresses one of the most challenging issues facing our community: pregnant teen moms in foster care – a number of who are victims of human trafficking," said Jennifer Williams, owner of Jennifer's. "They provide these traumatized pregnant girls with a safe and nurturing residence while transitioning teen moms and their babies from human trafficking and foster care to stable, safe and productive lives."

Jennifer's will also be collecting supplies for Our Mother's Home including: baby lotion/shampoo/oil, pacifiers, bottles, baby towels and washcloth sets, crib sheets, all sizes of diapers and baby wipes.

Jennifer's is located at 13451 McGregor Blvd, at Cypress Lake Drive. For information, call 481-8582 or visit jennifersfortmyers.com or at facebook.com/jennifersfortmyers.

Community Cooperative honors volunteers at annual reception

Community Cooperative honored hundreds of its volunteers and presented several awards at the Volunteer Appreciation Reception on March 26 at The Crowne Plaza in Fort Myers.

Award recipients are:

•**Rising Star:** Jeanne Varney

•**Group Volunteers of the Year:** Next Level Church

•**Volunteers of the Year:** Carolyn and John Smith

•**Meals on Wheels Driver of the Year:** John Walsh

•**“Volunteer Spirit” Award:** Cathy Komatz and Claudette O'Connor

“In the 30 years we have been serving our neighbors in need, countless volunteer hours have assisted in facilitating the programs we provide to our clients,” said Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative. “Our Meals on Wheels delivery volunteers have driven over 100,000 miles in the past year, delivering over 100,000 meals to our customers. The 1,200 dedicated volunteers at Community Cooperative donated over 54,000 hours of their time in 2014.”

Community Cooperative is a nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization made up of social service entrepreneurs fighting to end homelessness and hunger in our community. The agency provides more than 14,000 meals each month through its Community Cafés and Marketplace and Meals on Wheels programs and offers homeless and comprehensive case management services through its Social & Education Resource Centers.

A proud United Way partner, Community Cooperative serves Fort Myers and the greater Lee County area, including Bonita Springs, Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres and Fort Myers Beach. Community Cooperative works in close partnership with, The Harry Chapin Food Bank and The School District of Lee County as well as collaborating with fellow community and service groups, churches, businesses and community support organizations.

For information, call 332-7687 or visit CommunityCooperative.com.

Shop at Whole Foods to benefit Friends of Foster Children of SWFL

Whole Foods Market in Naples has selected Friends of Foster Children of Southwest Florida to be the beneficiary of its 5% Day on April 7.

Whole Foods Market created 5% Days to give back to local communities by providing support to nonprofit organizations whose programs directly benefit the communities surrounding their stores. The 5% Days are held quarterly in each store and on this special day, selected organizations receive 5 percent of a store's total pre-tax sales.

The mission of Friends of Foster Children is to focus on the children they serve by providing targeted educational and enrichment opportunities that allow each child to fulfill their potential.

For information about Friends of Foster Children of Southwest Florida, visit friendsoffosterchildren.net or call 262-1808.

Legally blind student is first in Lee County to earn GED

Eduardo Limonta is a client of the Lighthouse of SWFL, a graduate of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, a student at Florida Southwestern State College and the first blind person in Lee County to earn a GED or High School Equivalency Diploma.

Limonta needed to achieve the GED to go onto higher education because colleges do not accept the diplomas awarded by the School for the Deaf and the Blind because the curriculums are different from a public or private high school that require a core base of knowledge. So with the encouragement of family and friends and assistance from Maria Durrance with the Lee County School System he studied math, science, social studies a language arts in preparation for the exam.

In January 2014, Florida went paperless for the test and introduced a computerized web based version. Fortunately for Limonta computer skills and new technologies are being emphasized in schools and centers such as the Lighthouse because of the many applications and advances that have been made to assist the visually impaired and the blind. After earning his GED, Limonta was accepted at Florida Southwestern State College and started classes in January.

Community Health Association opens fund for Lehigh Community Services

The Community Health Association established a \$1.5 million fund at the Southwest Florida Community Foundation to support Lehigh Community Services.

Community Health Association is a private nonprofit foundation based in Lehigh Acres that has been promoting health education and improving the quality of care in Southwest Florida for 45 years. This new endowed fund establishes a legacy at the Community Foundation to ensure continued support of the citizens of Lehigh Acres.

Lehigh Community Services, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization started in 1977 for charitable purposes to assist in furthering the welfare and well being of those residents residing in Lehigh Acres. The agency provides emergency services to residents of the community while promoting self-sufficiency.