

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
FOR LOCALS, BY LOCALS

The Naples Press

NEWS FOR NEAPOLITANS

\$2.00

naplespress.com

JAN. 17-23, 2025

3A | FABULOUS LADIES

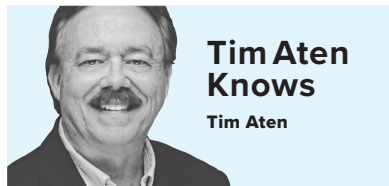
■ This group offers the healing power of female connection in midlife

4A | TEACHINGS OF PEACE

■ Visit from Tibetan Buddhist monks leaves a lasting impression in Naples

4B | CURTAIN UP

■ Theater fans have a smorgasbord of a week ahead with four plays opening



Tim Aten Knows
Tim Aten

Plans advance for second Costco store

Q: Will Costco try again for another building site in South Naples? — *Millie Wilcox, East Naples*

A: Costco Wholesale Corp. is moving ahead with plans for a second store in Collier County on the southeast corner of Rattlesnake Hammock Road and Collier Boulevard, immediately north of Physician Regional Medical Center-Collier Boulevard. Site development plans and renderings were created last fall for a 158,316-square-foot Costco store with a freestanding fueling station that would provide relief for the chain's busy longtime location on Naples Boulevard in North Naples.

Costco plans to develop nearly 26 acres on that heavily wooded corner at 8392 Collier Blvd., leaving 4 acres for outparcels fronting Collier Boulevard. The warehouse membership club would include the sale of groceries and merchandise; tire sales and installation areas; walk-in dairy and produce coolers; and a 2,000-square-foot liquor store, according to the warehouse concept plan created in September.

At a staff meeting last fall at Costco in North Naples, employees were told that the newly proposed Costco is targeted to open in 2026. Its construction is expected to be a fast-track project designed to be quickly built, most likely with tilt walls.

In December, the national re-

See ATEN KNOWS, Page 15A



Preparing children for kindergarten



Pathways Early Learning Center begins assessing children as young as toddler age for their development. Photo courtesy Pathways Early Learning Center

Pathways' \$2.25M initiative to enable more critical early learning

By Harriet Howard Heithaus
harriet.heithaus@naplespress.com

Pathways Early Education Center in Immokalee works with nearly 125 children to be school-ready on a level with their more advanced classmates.

Unfortunately, there's still a waiting list of more than 400.

Every year Pathways must turn away

the majority of families who need its help. To work toward remedying that, Pathways is expanding to serve 50% more children, giving the program room for more young minds. The organization has embarked on a \$2.25 million campaign, Brighter Futures, to improve the infrastructure of its current facility on Colorado Avenue, add mobile units for specialized education and invest in new programs.

There are five other childcare/early

learning centers in Immokalee, and those, too, have limited openings. Day care centers exist, but the Pathways mission is to address children with particular needs, its officials explained.

Children with special needs and those who qualify for school readiness funding through Florida from a federal Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant are

See PATHWAYS, Page 9A

Festival wine comes from many sources, for different needs

By Harriet Howard Heithaus
harriet.heithaus@naplespress.com

Bruce Nichols has been working with Naples Winter Wine Festival lots for 19 years, and he's not easy to impress. But the 25th anniversary festival has done it.

The Jan. 24-26 weekend is an immersion in fine wine, amazingly in a region that has no vineyards. What Naples does have, however, is serious oenophiles who have paired their love for the best vintages with a commitment to philanthropy. Both have helped immeasurably in the development of



NAPLES WINTER WINE FESTIVAL 25 YEARS

a festival focused on wine in multiple ways:

- As the "partner" for top-flight chefs at the Friday Vintner Dinners that attract attendees from the U.S., Canada and Europe
- For the conviviality of the buffet brunch and through the auction of some 52 lots
- For the lots themselves, at least half of which include world-class wines, highlighted by the prize of the festival: Lot 15, the annual Trustees' Treasure Trove

The impossible collection

This year it is enough for a full cellar — 239 bottles — of wines that range from rare to outright unavailable.

"That is the most incredible lot. I've been in the wine business for 40-plus years, in various forms, and I've never seen a collection first of that magnitude, and more importantly of that importance," observed Nichols, a wine counselor and former store owner. "It's hands-down impossible to duplicate. No one could ever put that together except the Naples Winter Wine Festival."

See WINES, Page 8A

WINK MORNINGS

Taylor Petras

Corey Lazar

Lindsey Sablan

Zach Maloch

Rachel Cox-Rosen

Funding needs still exist for Collier County agencies serving children

By Tim Aten
tim.aten@naplespress.com

Although the more than \$300 million raised by the Naples Winter Wine Festival has made a hefty and heartfelt difference in the lives of thousands of children in Collier County for decades, local needs still exist for nonprofit organizations serving underprivileged and at-risk children.

“Despite our tremendous success for nearly 25 years, the growth and adversities we have experienced in Collier have also led to greater needs,” said Maria Jimenez-Lara, CEO of Naples Children & Education Foundation, the founder and organizer of the annual wine festival.

Two areas — mental health services and early learning programs — especially still have critical needs in Collier County, Jimenez-Lara said.

“Mental health services need substantial expansion,” she said. “Behavioral problems among kindergarten, first- and second-grade students are at historically high levels. Since 2012, our Mental Health Initiative has provided over 85,000 youth with mental health services and treatment, but we still struggle to reach some children.”

Tragically, deaths by suicide have greatly increased in recent years. Suicide is the number one cause of death for children ages 14 to 15.



Maria Jimenez-Lara

“Despite our tremendous success for

nearly 25 years, the growth and adversities we have experienced in Collier have also led to greater needs,” said Maria Jimenez-Lara, CEO of Naples Children & Education Foundation, the founder and organizer of the annual wine festival.

Two areas — mental health services and early learning programs — especially still have critical needs in Collier County, Jimenez-Lara said.

“Mental health services need substantial expansion,” she said. “Behavioral problems among kindergarten, first- and second-grade students are at historically high levels. Since 2012, our Mental Health Initiative has provided over 85,000 youth with mental health services and treatment, but we still struggle to reach some children.”

Tragically, deaths by suicide have greatly increased in recent years. Suicide is the number one cause of death for children ages 14 to 15.



Some 350,000 Collier County children have benefited in the past 25 years from the nearly \$302 million raised by the Naples Winter Wine Festival, founded in 2001 by the Naples Children & Education Foundation. Photo courtesy NCEF

In addition to mental health services, early learning opportunities are insufficient, Jimenez-Lara said.

“We have made significant advancements, but about 75% of 4-year-olds are still not enrolled in high-quality early learning programs,” she said. “Research has consistently shown that high-quality, early childhood education produces extensive benefits, including better academic performance, higher graduation rates and stronger socio-emotional skills.”

Among other concerns, 65% of public-school students qualify for

free or reduced-price meals, and 8.8% of Collier youth lack health insurance, Jimenez-Lara said.

Giving 100%

More than 50 nonprofit organizations serving underprivileged and at-risk children in Collier benefited from the more than \$33 million raised last year by NCEF at the wine festival’s live auction. Dispelling a common misconception, Jimenez-Lara said every dollar raised by the festival is dedicated to children’s services and reinvested into the community every year.

“NCEF, the founding organiza-

tion of the festival, directs 100% of festival proceeds to fund essential services for at-risk and underprivileged children in Collier County,” she said. “Through the funds raised at the festival, NCEF fills a critical void for vulnerable children as the largest single source of funding for their essential services. This would not be possible without the incredible generosity of individuals and partners who attend the festival.”

NCEF and its network of partners have been a lifeline for 350,000 Collier children in the past 25 years by providing them with essential services that would

otherwise be inaccessible.

“For example, we established seven ‘strategic initiatives’ that address the needs of the whole child,” Jimenez-Lara said. “The initiatives have ensured that children and



youth have access to early learning programs and quality academic support throughout their schooling; social and emotional support to help them learn and excel; and medical care to keep them happy, healthy and engaged.”

Over the years, festival proceeds of nearly \$302 million since 2001 have been invested in more than 90 nonprofit partners, with transformative effects among Collier children, Jimenez-Lara said. NCEF is especially proud of these achievements:

- A 91% high school graduation rate countywide, up from 72.5% in 2011, and an 87.4% graduation rate at Immokalee High School, an improvement from 65% in 2011.

- Nearly two-thirds, 65%, of the children who attended voluntary pre-kindergarten were deemed “ready for kindergarten” in 2023-2024.

- A 35% decrease in the number of juvenile arrests from 2019-2022.

“These and other statistics reflect the effectiveness of the comprehensive systems of care that we helped developed over our first quarter-century,” Jimenez-Lara said. “We and our partners are truly changing lives and leveling the playing field for the most vulnerable children in our community.”

From page 1A

WINES

The high bidder is buying, thanks to the generosity of the donating trustees, extremely exclusive, small-harvest wines that may otherwise be unobtainable in certain vintages. There are such names as Screaming Eagle from California and Giuseppe Quintarelli, with an Italian 2015 Amarone della Valpolicella Riserva that retails in the \$750 range. A Spanish Tempranillo vintage from Pingus, a favorite of wine authority Robert Parker, is in the Trove. (A full list of all the lots is available at nwwf.org.)

The largest groupings of wines aren’t, however, up for bid. During the buffet luncheon and throughout the auction on Jan. 25, servers stand ready to pour a glass from what Nichols estimates as around 500 wines that the festival maintains in a storage unit, some of them from trustees, others from helpful donors in Naples. There’s a tasting station where attendees get an idea of what they want to drink.

“You won’t see very many that we have a dozen of the same one,” Nichols said. “So when I say we have north of 500 or 600 wines, there may only be one or two bottles of those.”

Inside the auction tent is yet another grouping: “Under the tent, the wines there are primarily much higher profile, if you will. And those wines would be, a lot of them, donated by the wineries themselves. So if you’re under the tent on auction day, you’re drinking some of the finest wines in the world.”

There are as many as 400 bottles — outside the Trustees Treasure Trove lot — coming to this festival for the live auction, traveling from the U.S., Europe, South America and Australia. A number of them are in large-format bottles



Half of this year’s NWWF auction lots include world-class wines, highlighted by the prize of the festival: Lot 15, the annual Trustees’ Treasure Trove.

Contributed photo

such as the magnum, which holds 10 glasses of wine, and the jeroboam, which holds roughly 25 glasses and is like pouring from a Mack truck trailer for the host.

Adding to worries about their vulnerability to breakage is the need for climate control; these are wines that can lose their character when the ambient temperature rises above 65 degrees.

Nichols is excited about the Merlot-based Petrus, and Liger-Belair (a Burgundy wine) on the lot list. Neither is distributed in Florida; Petrus, in fact, only comes to collectors by order in the U.S.

A word for Burgundy

“These are wineries that make 400 cases a year, or whatever that number is, miniscule by comparisons for most wines. And they’re so rare because — a Burgundy, (France),” Nichols said of the Liger-Belair wine.

“The genesis of that region goes clear back to the melting of the Ice Age,” he said. “When the Ice Age ended and the water receded, the sediment or the rocks or the stones or whatever was left in that region just makes some of the finest wines in the world.”

Even a starting-level Burgundy is going to be \$20 to \$30 higher than the red wine of choice

in Naples, Cabernet Sauvignon. Nichols hopes hearing about it from the festival will encourage people to try it.

“It’s an investment, not an expense, because of the pleasure you get from drinking a good Burgundy,” he declared.

Late trustee Michael D’Allesandro recruited Nichols to help him procure some of the incoming wine for the auction lots.

“And as it is with many of the people who have become involved with the wine festival, it tends to expand,” he said with a smile. But the festival’s volunteers are a critical part of its success. “It takes a village. It’s not just one person.”