

## RCMA TEACHER WINS PRESTIGIOUS GOLDEN APPLE AWARD FOR COLLIER COUNTY



Champions for Learning paid a special visit to RCMA's Immokalee Community Academy recently to announce that teacher Michael Gonzalez won a Golden Apple Award for 2022-2023. Out of 60 Teachers of Distinction, Mr. Gonzalez was selected as one of only six teachers to receive the prestigious award.

After receiving the award in his classroom from representatives from Champions for Learning, Mr. Gonzalez held up the apple, turned to his class and shouted, "We did it!"

When the excitement died down, Mr. Gonzalez became emotional when speaking with local news station NBC-2.

"These students are everything to me," he said. "I treat them like my own sons and my own daughters. I love them so much. They work so hard; I hope that I can be the best teacher for them." With this award, he most certainly is living up to his hopes.

**"THESE STUDENTS ARE EVERYTHING TO ME. I TREAT THEM LIKE MY OWN SONS AND MY OWN DAUGHTERS. I LOVE THEM SO MUCH. THEY WORK SO HARD. I HOPE THAT I CAN BE THE BEST TEACHER FOR THEM."**

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Spring is a busy and exciting time of year for us at RCMA. It brings transitions for some of our littlest as their parents prepare to move north, and is the home stretch for many of our school age students as summer nears. How exciting!

Our charter school teachers are putting the finishing touches on the academic year and believe it or not, are already preparing to make the next school year stellar.

In our CDC's, learning takes on more urgency, as teachers from our migrant programs prepare little ones and their parents to handle transitions and continue learning as they move in search for work over the summer. It's been an incredible season and our 0-5-year-olds have experienced significant growth. I am constantly amazed at the work that our faculty are doing in the classrooms on a daily basis. Our teachers truly connect with their students, and the results bear witness to the many hours of preparation they put into each and every lesson.

At RCMA, we have built a collaborative, caring and team-focused staff that truly cares about kids. They work extremely hard to help our students be engaged and excited about learning. They care about each student in both their learning and social/emotional wellbeing. And in the trust they build with their students, they are able to talk to them about their successes and challenges, creating a well-rounded student that wants to learn.

**Isabel Garcia**  
Executive Director



**“CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR STUDENTS, STAFF, AND TEACHERS ON ANOTHER AMAZING AND SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL YEAR. I WISH YOU ALL A SAFE AND HEALTHY SUMMER. WE’LL SEE YOU SOON!”**

## RCMA DEDICATES GAZEBO IN MEMORY OF VERO BEACH COUPLE



### Philanthropic Dynamic Duo spent years in dedication to kids and their families

Everyone has their own definition of priorities, but for Paul and Stella Covill, one of their main priorities was helping the children at RCMA.

“You didn’t get in mom’s way when she was going there on Wednesday,” recalls Kitley Covill McShane, daughter of the late philanthropic couple. “I’m sorry if you’re bleeding and your arm’s hanging off, I have to go read to those kids!” She was very invested in the success of RCMA and the work they do.”

To celebrate their legacy and the hours of time they dedicated to the organization, RCMA has honored the late Paul and Stella Covill with the dedication of a gazebo at the RCMA Children’s House in Vero Beach.

The Vero Beach couple were deeply committed to helping children and families succeed in their community. In 2003, the Covills launched the “Friends of RCMA in Indian River” initiative which built the Robert G.

Covill Child Development Center, in Fellsmere, FL, named in loving memory of their late son.

“Paul and Stella both had an amazing passion for helping children get off a good start in their lives and in their learning,” explains Isabel Garcia, Executive Director at RCMA. “The Covills understood how early childhood education can not only make a difference in young lives, but also how it can influence future generations. Giving kids opportunities is what motivated them. Their dedication to our mission and the families that we serve exemplifies a dynamic duo of philanthropy. The naming of the gazebo will pay tribute to them and their generosity for generations to come.”

**“THE COVILLS UNDERSTOOD HOW EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CAN NOT ONLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUNG LIVES, BUT ALSO HOW IT CAN INFLUENCE FUTURE GENERATIONS.”**

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# STUDENTS SEND LETTERS OF COMFORT TO TURKEY



On February 6, 2023, at 4:17 a.m. local time, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked southeast Turkey near the Syrian border. Just hours later, it was followed by a 7.5 magnitude aftershock, with an additional 6.3 magnitude aftershock occurring just weeks later. The area has experienced thousands of smaller tremors following the major quakes. To date, over 50,000 have died and millions have been left homeless.

Several time zones away, RCMA teacher Ozgur Dursun can only watch in horror while his beloved home country has been rocked to its core by the disaster. The devastation hit close to home for him as his cousin and her husband lost their lives in the quake.

“My cousin Zilan and her husband Mikail had just moved to the affected area a week prior,” he says. “Their bodies were found in the rubble still holding hands. The rescuers believe that they were rushing to get out of their apartment building but did not make it.”

Being a native of Turkey, Dursun felt compelled to do something.

“I showed a picture of the devastation in Turkey to my first-grade class and we talked about what the kids there might be going through. I said, ‘we need to send them some letters to support them, give them some encouragement,’ and that got my students started.”

What began as a class project blossomed into a school-wide effort.

“We talked with Ms. Quintero (RCMA’s Immokalee Community Academy principal) about the idea, she thought it was great, and we set out to write the letters.”

In the end, dozens of letters were written by the students and are now on their way to Turkey.

Among the many letters written were messages including, “Be strong,” “We can’t play with you but we would,” “I wish I was there to hug you,” and other well wishes, all from the

children’s mindset.

According to Dursun, he is not the only teacher in his classroom.

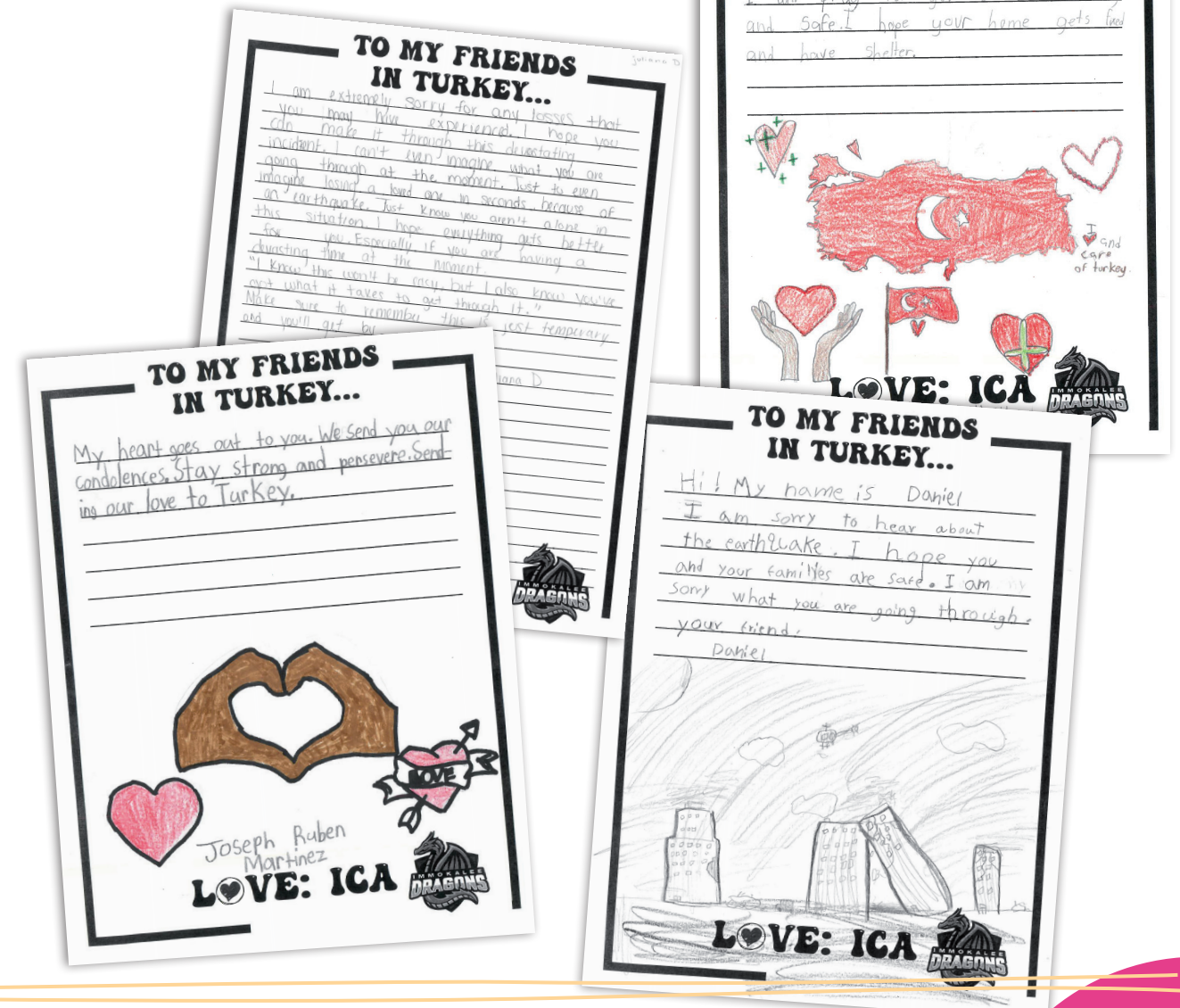
“I am amazed at how much I learn from them, especially how they can think without biases. It constrains us, because when we identify ourselves, we do it by gender, by religion, by ethnicity, by race, but they don’t have that. For adults, it’s layer after layer, and when you put those

overlapping, there is only a small area for common ground. For them, they have none of that. They don’t have those filters, because they are still finding their own character. I learn from them all the time.”

For Dursun, all of his students definitely earned an A+ for this exercise.

“The word ‘very’ is not strong enough when I say that I am very proud of them.”

**“IN THE END, DOZENS OF LETTERS WERE WRITTEN BY THE STUDENTS AND ARE NOW ON THEIR WAY TO TURKEY.”**



# FARM AND FOOD WORKERS RELIEF GRANT PROGRAM



In March, the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association (NMSHSA) teamed up with RCMA staff to register eligible farm workers to receive \$600 gift cards as part of the Farm and Food Workers Relief Grant Program. In the matter of just two days, with 12 volunteers helping with registration, RCMA was able to provide payments to more than 1,100 farm workers in the Immokalee area.

“The work and contributions that farm workers provide is so vital to our country. We are proud to help distribute this critical economic relief to a population that is feeding America.”

The NMSHSA received a \$57.3 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to support the program. The USDA grant program, as a continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic, awards qualified organizations who serve farm and food worker

communities a grant to distribute \$600 payments to eligible farm workers, meat packing workers and/or grocery store workers. The funds are intended to cover expenses resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

What proved to be a hectic weekend for the volunteers also brought happiness and much needed assistance to the families that were on hand to register for the gift cards that were being distributed.

“It was priceless to see the smiles and relief on their faces,” said Gloria Padilla, Community Relations Manager for RCMA. “People started forming a line since 6 p.m. the night before. They waited 16 hours in line! I asked if they had slept there and I heard a loud response from the crowd, ‘YES!’

**“WITH EVERYTHING COSTING MORE THESE DAYS, HIGHER PRICES ON FOOD ARE HITTING EVERYONE HARD, ESPECIALLY FARM WORKER FAMILIES.”**

**ISABEL GARCIA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RCMA**

“One couple told me that they did not want to miss the opportunity to obtain a card because they needed to pay their utility bills or else their lights would have been shut down the following Tuesday.”

Padilla says that the weekend was filled with both gratitude and emotion.

**“ONE MOM I TALKED TO HAD TEARS IN HER EYES BECAUSE IT WAS ALL THE MONEY SHE WOULD HAVE FOR THE MONTH. SHE HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO WORK DUE TO HEALTH ISSUES. SHE GAVE ME SUCH A HUGE HUG! I AM SO THANKFUL THAT THESE FUNDS ARE GOING TO THE NEEDIEST OF THE FARM WORKER FAMILIES!”**



## LEARNING A VALUABLE LIFE LESSON ABOUT GIVING BACK

When someone is looking to become a leader, or to improve their leadership skills, the choice might be to enroll in a leadership program. These programs offer an instructional experience designed to help individuals develop and enhance their leadership skills and abilities. For the students of the Emerging Leader Development Program offered by the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), giving back was just one of many skills they had the chance to improve on.

RCMA board member Sonia Tighe has passionately provided leadership training for the next generation of agriculture workers for many years. She coordinates a visit to RCMA centers as part of her annual leadership class, not only sharing with her students the importance of the work that RCMA is doing in serving children and their families, but illustrating how giving back is part of good leadership as well.

Sonia devised a philanthropic element to the leadership curriculum, and her students were eager to learn more about RCMA and to give back to those that so generously serve their community.

“As part of the program, we ask each class to do something philanthropic. In every case, they have chosen to do something for RCMA. We let them know the importance of RCMA to farm workers; obviously the farm workers are critically important to our members who are growers. These visits to the RCMA centers near Plant City and Belle Glade have always been highly impactful.”

For Tighe, she finds that strong leadership includes being able to give back to the community, and to influence others to do the same.

“This year I challenged them to collect food items to donate to the families for the Belle Glade RCMA,” she says. “During this project, we



“EACH YEAR WE TAKE 12-15 CANDIDATES TO DIFFERENT AGRICULTURAL LOCATIONS, HELPING THEM LEARN MORE ABOUT THE INDUSTRY,” EXPLAINS TIGHE.

“THESE ARE RISING STARS IN AGRICULTURE FROM SEVERAL TOP AGRICULTURAL COMPANIES THAT ARE MEMBERS OF FFVA. WE WANT TO TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS, SO WE TAKE THEM INTO THE DIFFERENT AGRICULTURAL LOCATIONS TO SEE WHAT THE ISSUES ARE.”

wanted them to focus on giving back to the communities in which they live and work. I also wanted to take the opportunity while I have them out in the field to stop in to some of these facilities so that they can see how RCMA operates and what they bring to the farm worker families.”

Accepting the challenge, the students were able to collect enough food items to fill three luggage bays in a huge bus. In addition to the experience, the students

also came away with lots of knowledge about RCMA and all that it does for the community.

“The students were very surprised at the scope of what RCMA is able to do,” she said. “These are schools that get children ready to move into other grades. They also take care of the entire family, not just the child. It’s about what the families need to get by as well. To see the scope of what RCMA does first hand, that was really meaningful to them.”

“AS PART OF THE PROGRAM, WE ASK EACH CLASS TO DO SOMETHING PHILANTHROPIC. IN EVERY CASE, THEY HAVE CHOSEN TO DO SOMETHING FOR RCMA.”





## MEET THE RCMA BOARD: DONNA GAFFNEY



To see a child succeed, especially when the odds are stacked against them, is what drives Donna Gaffney every single day.

After growing up in Wisconsin, she moved to Milwaukee to attend Alverno College. Following her graduation with a master's degree in Community Health, she moved to Chicago, met her husband Tom, and took a job with a visiting nurse association.

Meanwhile, Donna and her husband were making annual trips to Florida to visit her parents. It was the late 70's, and on a fateful visit to St. Anne's Church in Ruskin, Florida, Donna was first exposed to RCMA.

"My parents attended St. Anne's, and they had mentioned to the priest there that my husband and I did lots of charitable things. At the time, RCMA had a child care center on the grounds of the church. Since our visit was during the holidays, we decided to do a Christmas party for them. We loved it!"

After a few years, Donna's passion for supporting RCMA grew, along with her respect for the services that the organization offers the students and families it serves.

"The biggest thing was to see what these centers were doing with these children. These kids had basically nothing. It was just incredible, the passion for what they do. It was a beautiful experience for me. They were so dedicated in trying to take care of these kids and prepare them for school. Their classrooms were so beautifully done and so intellectually stimulating for the kids. It's just so impressive. There is so much love in what they do."

After supporting RCMA for over 40 years, Donna is still moved by the organization and its mission to help children and their families.

"After all these years, that compassion is still there, and the people who work there are so dedicated. They're just good people because of the mission they have. I've been around a lot of nonprofits; this one is really special."

**"ALL KIDS DESERVE A CHANCE. THAT'S WHY I LIKE WHAT RCMA IS DOING – THEY ARE GIVING KIDS A CHANCE, AND THAT IS SO IMPORTANT."**

## 23RD ANNUAL LIPMAN FAMILY FARMS GOLF CLASSIC MAY 20, 2023 NAPLES GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB



There's still time to register for the 23rd Annual Lipman Family Farms Golf Classic. This year's tournament will be held on Friday, May 20, 2023, and will welcome golfers to the Naples Heritage Golf & Country Club. The course recently received many substantial upgrades to what has been named an Audubon Certified Cooperative Sanctuary for Golf.

Players can register for the event by going online at [RCMA.org/golf](http://RCMA.org/golf), by calling (239) 658-3560 or email: [cr@rcma.org](mailto:cr@rcma.org). In addition to 18-hole play on a magnificent course, attendees also receive a light breakfast, door prizes, beverages, hole activities including a Hole In One Prize of \$10,000, a raffle and entrance to the post-play lunch reception and award ceremony. RCMA once again honor the late Brad Young of Naples for his kindness, generosity and long-time support of the tournament and of RCMA's mission.

Fees for the tournament are \$275 per person or \$1,000 per foursome. Proceeds from the tournament support RCMA early childhood and community school programs.



2022 1st Place Team – First Bank

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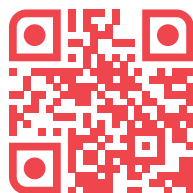
### Spring 2023 Newsletter



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