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The Mission of The Junior League

The Junior League of Tampa is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

Editor's Note

Greetings Sandspur Readers

Did you know that March was Women's History Month? An entire month is designated to honor great leaders such as Rosa Parks, Amelia Earhart and Harriet Tubman. Women who defied the odds, made sacrifices and changed the way we live our lives today. In many ways, the women of The Junior League of Tampa (JLT) are aspiring to the legacy set forth by these famous leaders. These JLT members have put their families last on the list of priorities so that others in the community may have better lives. Although you may not know their names, these women selflessly donate their time and effort to improve the literacy and education of children in our communities, provide basic needs to the disadvantaged, and, as you will read in this issue, enhance the lives of children in foster care.

This issue's feature articles focus on foster care. You will discover how the JLT is fostering hope, as our cover's caption states, within our community. Laura Hobby summarizes the League's comprehensive approach to the issue of foster care in her Community Vice President column. Laura's article, which is entitled, "An Interview with Milly," provides an up-close and personal look at the Connected by 25 community project from the vantage point of one of its participants. Recent updates on the progress of the

Connected by 25 project are described on page 24. We also have the results and some great photographs of the last Kids Connect Event at Gameworks held in October.

In addition, we are honored to have an article written by Ashley Rhodes-Courter. Ashley is a successful foster care survivor, public speaker and adoption activist. Read her touching and informative article on page 20. For a personal look into the Guardian Ad Litem program, Jaime Girgenti, a *Sandspur* writer, shares her experiences in the role of Guardian Ad Litem.

On behalf of *The Sandspur* staff, we hope you enjoy reading this issue. As always, many thanks to all the members in The Junior League of Tampa and those individuals outside the League who assisted with this issue. Your time and efforts are greatly appreciated! Lastly, although the month of March has passed, take a moment to reflect on the great women of the past..... and present.

Regards,
Susan Brindise



Susan E. Brindise
The Sandspur Editor

The Junior League of Tampa THE SANDSPUR

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Permanency Planning for Foster Care

By Paula A. Sincell

The process of taking prompt, decisive action to maintain children in their own homes, or to permanently place them with other families is called permanency planning for foster care. A study conducted by Becker, M. A., Jordan, N., & Larsen, R. (2005), shows that Florida's 24% rate of successful permanency planning for children in foster care lags behind the rest of the country and is well below the national goal. In Florida, the single most important factor determining whether a child will have a successful permanency planning outcome is the geographical district where the child resides. Children in state care with mental disorders have about half the rate of permanency planning success than children without mental disorders. Statewide adoption of the child welfare policies and procedures in the more successful districts and provision of adequate behavioral health services for children in the child welfare system and their parents has the potential to significantly improve permanency planning outcomes.

According to the Becker study, permanency planning for the past quarter-century has been the accepted practice of the American child welfare system. "The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (P.L. 105-89) attempts to assure permanency planning, and requires increased attention to the rate and speed with which permanent placement is achieved for children placed in foster care."

According to most recent national estimates, there has been a 65% increase in the number of children in foster care in the past decade. More than 70,000 cases of documented child maltreatment were identified in 2002, resulting in more than 22,000 children being placed in foster care in Florida. Although foster care is expected to be temporary, there is growing evidence that the foster care system is not operating as intended. The Becker study states, "Despite ASFA, more children than ever before are entering foster care, staying longer than federally mandated, and reentering the foster care system after unsuccessful attempts at reunification."

Children in foster care are of special concern, because they are a particularly vulnerable population at high risk for behavioral health problems. In addition, children with multiple foster care placements have significantly higher odds of entering the delinquency or criminal justice systems. As the number of children in foster care increases, there is a tremendous impact on the quality of care in the child welfare system. In Florida, the immediate implications from increasing numbers of children in foster care include overcrowded foster homes and escalating caseloads for child welfare workers.

In Florida, the single most important factor determining whether a child will have a successful outcome of permanency planning is the geographical district where the child resides. Across Florida, geography alone appeared to account for a 7-fold difference among districts in the rate of successful permanency planning. Other factors that helped determine the outcome of permanency planning are largely the same in Florida as the rest of the country as a whole.

Differences in procedure, should they be found, might help explain the observed differences across districts in the length of stay and permanency outcomes found in this study. Dissemination of identified effective practices and child welfare policies, which support permanency planning with reduced length of stay, could both improve child welfare outcomes and save taxpayer money.

In summary, best-achieving districts that had rates of successful permanency planning were well below the national goal. While it should be possible to make administrative changes to improve Florida's overall success rate, there is a need for still further improvements. The Becker study concludes: Given the common occurrence of mental health and substance use disorders in parents of children in foster care, it is essential that policy makers insure that sufficient mental health and substance abuse services are made available to serve the needs of families in the child welfare system. It is unlikely that significant improvement in child welfare permanency outcomes can be achieved in Florida without the provision of high-quality child welfare and behavioral healthcare services.

References: Becker, M. A., Jordan, N., & Larsen, R. (2005). *Predictors of Successful Placement Outcomes in Florida's Foster Care System, Policy Brief #21.*



advocate, friend, guardian.

By Jaime R. Girgenti, Esquire



What comes to mind when you think back to your childhood? When I reflect back to the days when I was growing up, I have nothing but warm, fond memories of days filled with fun and laughter. I am so blessed to have been raised in a loving home with two parents who worked hard and sacrificed to give me and my siblings everything we could have ever wanted or needed.

While I was a law student at the University of Florida, I was always looking for ways to “boost” my resume with various activities, which could possibly increase my chances of obtaining the forever sought after job with the “big” law firm. With that idea in mind, I decided to become a volunteer for the Florida Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program. A Volunteer Guardian ad Litem is an individual who is appointed by the court to advocate for children who have come into the court system primarily as a result of

alleged abuse or neglect. When I became a volunteer GAL, my expectations were to network with the family law judges and obtain valuable courtroom experience. Sure, it gave me that, and so much more!

When a child falls prey to abuse or neglect, and the state removes a child from his home, the child falls under the supervision of the Florida Department of Children and Families. At that point, the court appoints a GAL whose role is to spend time with the child and report back to the judge the findings and recommendations as to what is in “the best interest of that child.”

As an independent volunteer, I learned early on that the Juvenile Court judges rely heavily on the recommendations of the GAL. Thus, it was very important that I become extremely familiar with the child, enabling me to make educated recommendations as to what served the child’s physical and emotional well being best. The goal was to

According to the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program website (www.gal.fl.gov), a Guardian ad Litem carries out the following activities:

- **Investigation:** Carries out an objective, systematic examination of the situation, including relevant history, environment, relationships, and needs of the child. The GAL interviews family, friends, neighbors and members of the child’s school.
- **Facilitation:** Identifies resources and services for the child and facilitates a collaborative relationship between all parties involved in the case, helping to create a situation in which the child’s needs are met.
- **Advocacy:** Conveys the best interests of the child to the court and relevant agencies.
- **Monitoring:** Keeps track of whether the orders of the court, as well as the plans of the Department of Children and Families, are carried out.

ensure that every abused child was living in an environment that promotes the child’s healthy growth and development.

Each case I worked as a GAL was humbling. What these children endured was not only shocking, but also heart-breaking. I encountered a number of children who entered the foster care system as a result of their drug-addicted mothers’ neglect. Unfortunately, the foster care system has more children who require placement than willing and able foster care parents. As a result, siblings are often separated, and children are placed in homes with one caretaker and four or five other children.

It was extremely gratifying to be a part of the process, which ensured that neglected and abused children were placed in a situation where they may flourish and be happy.

We only get one chance at a happy childhood. The GAL program is the first step in ensuring that innocent children get back the childhood they deserve.

For more information on the Guardian ad Litem Program, please visit www.guardianadlitem.org.



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Mary Lee's House

Many years ago, a child is left home with her uncle. Sally is four. Her mother thought nothing to leave her just to run to the grocery store. What happens next is incomprehensible. The small child is assaulted by her uncle. At four years old, the situation does not seem to calculate or register in the child's mind. Sally has never been told about "privates." The uncle is never seen again, and the child does not realize the trauma endured until she is much older. Sally could be any woman you know. Sally could be any child you know.

Today, we are aware that such incidences of abuse occur. More than 15,000 children are abused annually in Hillsborough County. Children like Sally have long needed a voice. More than four years ago, the Administrative Office of the Courts for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit received state funding to develop a task force to address this critical

need. Coincidentally, a nonprofit charitable organization, which focuses on children, partnered with local and state agencies to launch a facility to help with these same needs. The two projects merged, and as a result, Mary Lee's House was born. The idea was structured upon a national model of child advocacy centers and on successfully operating centers in Florida. The Junior League of Tampa's Sustainer Mary Lee Farnior led the initiative and has devoted countless volunteer hours to making this vision a reality. After extensive fundraising, planning, and execution, construction of Mary Lee's House began on October 30, 2007. Remarkably, one year and one day later, Mary Lee's House opened its doors to the fragile child abuse victims of our community.

Mary Lee's House is a state of the art facility allowing professionals to best serve the needs of children as a team in one location. The 30,000 square foot center houses the Children's Justice Center, which is a fully-accredited child advocacy center that is a program of the Administrative Office of

the Courts for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit; the Child Protection Team of the Department of Pediatrics of the University of South Florida; Child Protective Investigators from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office; child mental health specialists; the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County and the APPLE Trauma Response Center of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay. The State Attorney's Office, the public defender, and other law enforcement offices will also have space at Mary Lee's House. By being situated under one roof, the multidisciplinary team's goal is to prevent the child abuse victim from being shuffled and moved around while investigations take place. This is far less traumatic to the child. Executive Director of Mary Lee's house, Lisa Colen, points to the success of the "under one roof model" stating, "the rate of conviction increases five times when all agencies are situated in one building.

The goals of the multidisciplinary team are: child abuse prevention; medical examinations; social assessments; forensic interviews; mental health care; identifying mental health services; and criminal investigations. With the assistance of the Mary Lee's House trained team, children with allegations of physical or sexual abuse will receive exams and interviews in one location. The child may need assistance in dealing

with the physical, emotional and psychological effects of the abuse; and at the same time, the child may need to act as a witness in a criminal prosecution or possibly be placed in a foster home.

The Junior League of Tampa has played an important role in the development of Mary Lee's House and plans to continue this collaboration in the future. The League made a \$100,000 capital donation primarily for the build out of the lobby. In addition, the League has partnered with the agency to stock the Love Bundles closet and provides volunteers to assist with events.

In 2009-2010, The Junior League of Tampa's Provisional project is planned for Mary Lee's House for the entire Provisional Class with a budget of \$10,000. The new members will have a chance to research and staff the emerging needs of Mary Lee's House as well as become the newest experts on child advocacy among the membership. The Mary Lee's House clothing closet volunteers will continue to stock backpacks of emergency supplies and other urgently needed items.

Through an awareness of the epidemic in our community, our children will not need to go through what Sally did. "Mary Lee's House...meeting the legal, medical, and emotional needs of children who have been abused so that healing can begin and the cycles of abuse can be broken."

Upon entering Mary Lee's House, a child like Sally is greeted by the "Branches of Hope" waiting room designed and donated by The Junior League of Tampa. An amazing life-like tree offers a sense of peace and calm. The room is decorated in warm and soothing colors with comfortable and inviting furniture. A large flat screen television allows for a distraction. A focal point is the interactive wall complete with toys for children of every age. There are multiple books, toys, and a large child-sized table with chairs. In the rear of the waiting room are two quiet rooms with comfortable furniture where children and their families can wait for the multidisciplinary team in a peaceful setting. The waiting room offers a feeling of comfort and distraction in a safe environment. The focus is a feeling of serenity, very distant from tragedy.



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This edition of *The Sandspur* includes a cumulative listing of commemorative gifts received from November 15, 2008 through March 13, 2009, the submission deadline for this issue. Gifts received after this date will be listed in the next edition of *The Sandspur*. If you have any corrections or additions for future lists, please contact Kelly Nelson at kellynelson@yahoo.com.

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The Glazer Children's Museum Breaks Ground

On Monday, March 8, 2009, the new \$21 million Glazer Children's Museum held a groundbreaking ceremony. Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio, Hillsborough County Commissioner Ken Hagan, Darci Glazer Kasewitz of the Glazer Family Foundation, and Glazer Children's Museum President and CEO Al Najjar and Museum Chairman Sandy Murman spoke to a sizable crowd which included a number of Junior League members and their children. Last June, The Junior League of Tampa committed \$250,000 to the museum. The 3-story, 53,000 square foot museum is expected to open early next year and is expected to draw 210,000 visitors annually.



From left to right: Membership Vice President Allison Burden, Provisional Angela Ardolino, Chairman of the Board for the Glazer Children's Museum Sandy Murman, President Jennifer Johnson, Active Britton Cisneros, Active Melinda Rix and Sustainer Kasey Kelly.

Gasparilla Invasion Party

Over 100 children and their families came to Junior League Headquarters on February 7th to watch the Gasparilla flotilla invasion. Colleen Crosby and Laurie Buckey organized a event with a variety of children's games and activities to keep the little ones busy. Activities included decorating your own map, getting your face painted and having your picture taken with a pirate! As the pirate ships readied to pass, everyone crowded onto the Junior League back lawn to watch the event from our prime waterfront location. It was a fantastic way to start Gasparilla!



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Lost

in the System

Found

by a Guardian ad Litem

By Ashley Rhodes-Courter

I like to think my life story has three parts. First, is the time when I felt like I was lost and alone in the foster care system. Second, is when my Guardian ad Litem, Mary Miller, came into my life. And third, is when Mary Miller, a volunteer Guardian ad Litem, helped find a permanent family for me.

I lived in foster care for almost ten years, with 14 different placements. I later learned that almost 25% of my foster parents were, or became, convicted felons. After being in one egregiously abusive foster home where I was crammed into a three bedroom trailer with 14 other foster kids, I was moved to a foster home to be with my younger brother. My new foster parents started checking to see if we had a volunteer Guardian ad Litem—a court appointed advocate for children in the dependency court system. All children in the Florida system are supposed to have one, but I had been in the system for more than five years, and no one was ever appointed. One guardian, Mary Miller, was already representing a child in the Burrill's home so she asked if she could take our case.



This is the folded in page,
would print behind
the page below





I'd like to say that Mary and I became best friends, but by then I was used to caseworkers who came and went—all sorts of therapists, counselors, and people with different titles who said they would do things but never did. I'd already had eight foster mothers, a biological mother, my grandfather's girlfriend, not to mention shifts of counselors in the shelter, and although Mary was nice enough, I didn't expect her to make a difference. Why should I? Nobody else ever had.

In order to write my book, "Three Little Words," I had to travel through my case files which included over 80,000 documents. From these, I made a list of all of the signatures I could find that represented a portion of the adults that interacted with me during my time in care. See which one might have been able to make a difference in my life when I had:

73 child welfare administrators

44 child welfare caseworkers

19 foster parents

23 attorneys

17 psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists

5 Guardian ad Litem staff

4 judges

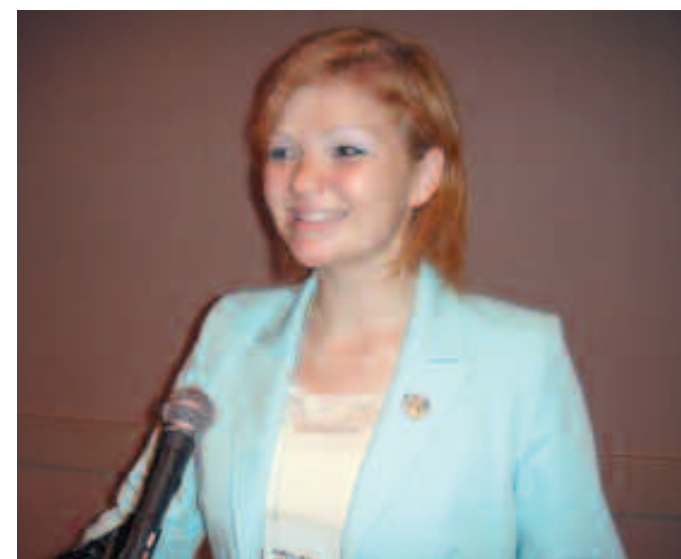
4 court personnel

3 abuse registry workers

2 primary caseworkers

1 Guardian ad Litem

Out of these 195 people, Mary Miller was the only person not PAID to take care of me, yet she worked the hardest to get me out of the foster care system, and ultimately find me the adoptive family that transformed my life forever. She wasn't trained in any particular field. She was just a woman who had a little bit of time, and a really big heart.



USA TODAY'S 2007 All-USA College Academic Team

Here are the members of USA TODAY's 18th annual All-USA College Academic First Team. The 20 undergraduates' accomplishments range from leading Hurricane Katrina relief efforts to helping NASA understand the geological history of Mars.

Ashley Rhodes-Courter
 Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL
 Hometown: Crystal River, FL Age: 21
 Majors: Communications; Theater
 GPA: 3.84 Graduating: May 2008
 Career goal: Public policy, politics, public relations

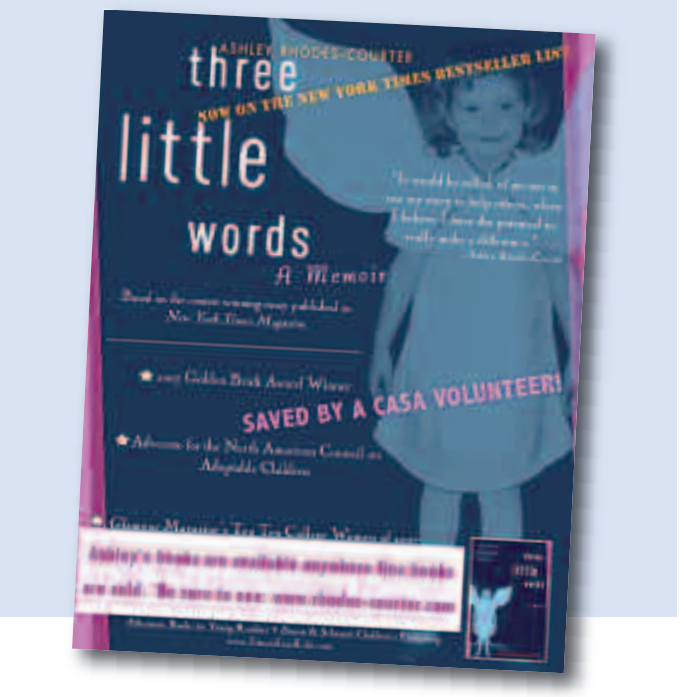
Pictured: On stage at Eckerd College
Accomplishments: A former foster child who was placed in 14 different homes in 10 years before being adopted, she has written a memoir, *Three Little Words*, to be released in 2008 by Simon & Schuster; frequent public speaker on foster care at professional conferences and motivational speaker for varied audiences; 2004 Adoption Youth Advocate of the Year by the North American Council on Adoptable Children; Child Welfare League of America Kids-to-Kids Grand Prize essay award; resident adviser; intern director for Palmetto Productions, coordinating campus entertainment; club rugby player turned assistant coach after knee injury; service learning trip to South Africa.

Photo by Preston Mack for USA TODAY

While sorting through my case files, I also discovered that in one place I was noted as being a little boy, in another place, it said I had blue eyes (when in fact I have brown). I believe that every child deserves to have at least one adult in their lives that knows the color of their eyes.

Caring for abused and neglected children must be a community effort. If these children turn 18 and have no home or prospects, we might very well be dealing with them in a different welfare system. According to the Child Welfare League of America, 25 percent become homeless, 56 percent are unemployed, and 27 percent of male children end up in jail. There are more than 500,000 children in foster care nationally—each of them simply needing a voice, and a chance.

Mary Miller took that chance and volunteered hundreds of hours to help children who were unrelated to her. She not only changed my life, she also showed me what it is to be humane and help others as part of our role as human beings. As the author Leo Buscaglia wrote, "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." Our society is a far better place because of people like Mary who will do so much for a stranger.



This was no ordinary journey.

Crystal chandeliers shined delicate light upon snow white trees that hugged the walls. Music set the tone for fun and exploration. A candlelit walkway helped guests navigate the winter wonderland, setting the stage for this year's Junior League of Tampa's Leadership Development Seminar: Pathways to Leadership: Your League, Your Community, Your Life.

More than 150 members attended the event at Headquarters on January 6th, where they learned how involvement in the League has influenced personal and professional lives throughout the Tampa Bay area and beyond.

Guest speakers were led by former JLT president and current CEO of Achieve Tampa Bay Karen Ryals.

"My years in the Junior League were among the best of my life," Ryals said. "You have the energy, creativity and vision to make wonderful things happen in this community."

Diane Zambito, Executive Director of Connected by 25 (Cby25), helped members understand how their work is perceived and appreciated by those who are touched by this community service. For several years, the League has worked closely with Cby25, helping ensure that foster care youth are educated, housed, banked, employed and connected to a support system by age 25.

"What breaks our young people, you help repair," Zambito said. "You are the most powerful tool for the work we do in Hillsborough County."

Jacqueline Landry, CEO of the Academy of the Holy Names, capped the evening with reflections on how each individual's life journey can be their personal road to success and fulfillment.

"Try for contentment," Landry advised. "Make the mind a pleasant place in which to loiter."

Landry suggested women take time to step back and reflect on the things we have accomplished while looking to do that which fuels our passions.

"You influence the most by being your authentic self," Landry said. "You may never know the power of one small act."

Special thanks to our sidewalk vendor, A La Carte Event Pavilion Décor & Design, for decorations; to Marvelous Mark Motivation & Music for entertainment; to the Training Committee for coordinating the event; and to all who took time out of their busy schedules to attend this special night.



Guest Speaker
Ashley Rhodes-Courter
New York Times
Bestselling Author of
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Do you remember when you moved out of your parents' home, the first time you lived alone, or, maybe, even with a roommate? Was it in college or when you had saved enough money to live on your own?

The sheer excitement built for days and weeks leading up to such a significant milestone in your life. The word "freedom" may have crossed your mind – no curfew, eating what you wanted to eat and when you wanted to eat it.

But, what if you did not want to move? What if you were not prepared since you did not have a plate to eat upon or a pillow to call your own? What if you were forced to move out because it was your 18th birthday?

That's right – because you turned 18 years old, you were forced to find shelter, food, and fend for yourself. That was the reality for approximately 115 youth who aged out of licensed foster care in Hillsborough County in 2008, according to Hillsborough County's Independent Living Services Program.

The Junior League of Tampa partnered with Connected by 25 to improve the lives of these vulnerable young people. Connected by 25 is a community initiative that engages youth, public/private partners and policy makers to improve the outcomes for foster youth through investments in services and programs. Connected by 25's mission is to ensure that foster care youth are educated, housed, banked, employed and connected to a support system by age 25.

Since partnering with Connected by 25 in 2007, The Junior League of Tampa has provided more than 125 move-in kits for youth who are aging out of the foster care system. The kit is designed to provide some of the essentials that are needed to be "on your own" for the very first time. Laundry baskets are loaded with sheets, pillow, towels, can opener, cookie sheets, cups and silverware. These basic items assist the 18 year olds transition to living on their own and being responsible solely for themselves.

In addition to the move-in kits, The Junior League of Tampa has hosted three sibling events uniting over 150 brothers and sisters for a day of fun at Malibu Grand Prix. For many of the foster care youth, brothers and sisters entering foster care are not guaranteed placement in the same home, and they are often placed in separate homes without regular visitation with each other. The sibling event provides them the opportunity to spend time together and catch up on their lives. There are plenty of activities at Malibu Grand Prix along with the chance to showcase their talents with a karaoke machine, which is a favorite activity of the day. The one token that we found to be the most meaningful of the sibling event is the photo of the brothers and sisters together, which is given to each of them before they leave.

The Junior League of Tampa also enhances the Connected by 25 curriculum by providing life-skills training in a one-day education summit. The summit is a training session to educate the youth on basic necessities like buying/leasing a car, understanding and completing a lease agreement for an apartment, and interview etiquette. The day begins with a motivational speaker to create perspective on their situation and how they can leverage the strength of their experiences to be successful. In February, the education summit ended with an exciting Tampa Bay Lightning game.

With a combination of fun, education, and assistance, The Junior League of Tampa has helped open doors for youth beyond of our local Connected by 25 project. Connected by 25 has been successful in creating change in the foster care system across the state of Florida by lobbying for programs, like the sibling event, to be adopted at the state level so that all foster care youth have the opportunity to visit with their brothers and sisters regularly. This is just one example of how The Junior League of Tampa is accomplishing our mission not only in Tampa but also across the state.



An Interview with Milly– A Connected by 25 Success Story

Milly is nineteen years old. She aged out of foster care a year ago and is a past client of Connected by 25. She shares with us some of her recent experiences in the system.

JLT: What can you share with us about your background?

Milly: I first went into foster care when I was six and stayed for two years. Then, when I was 12, my mother lost her parental rights. I was in about seven or eight group homes until I aged out of foster care. One time they even had to move me to Vero Beach, because there was no room here.

JLT: What is your biggest accomplishment?

Milly: When I was seventeen, I was living in St. Pete because there was not a place for me in Hillsborough County. I kept running away. I finally decided to quit running and turn myself in. Because I was seventeen, I was able to get my diploma before I aged out. That helped me go to college so I could make something of myself. Connected by 25 and Independent Living Services helped me get started.

JLT: How has Connected by 25 and its partnership helped you reach your goals?

Milly: I have had an opportunity to work at Connected by 25 as an employee. I learned financial literacy there and received a "Reach for the Stars" scholarship that helped pay for my car insurance. I paid it back by doing community service hours at Connected by 25.

When I was in the system, I was able to go to the Sibling Events [sponsored by the Junior League]. Even though I didn't have any siblings in the system, I got to see my friends from other group homes. I really needed my move-in supplies [refers to Move In Kits provided by the Junior League]. My favorite is my blanket. It is a quilt that is big and warm. I also needed the laundry basket.

JLT: Has there been a volunteer who has made a difference in your life?

Milly: Well, actually, there are two. One is Ms. Anderson. She took me in for five years and did not receive any services. Mr. Babb at Independent Living Services helped me fill out my financial aid forms, look for a car, and move into my first apartment.

JLT: What are your goals?

Milly: To support myself. Right now, I am a full-time student, and I work a job on the weekends for 20 hours. I want to have a family someday and support my kids. I hope to be an elementary school teacher -- maybe fourth grade.

Connected
by 25

Community Vice President Column

On a Saturday morning last fall, I headed to Gameworks in Ybor city for our League's fall Kids Connect event. Having never attended before, I was skeptical about the impact of this project. I had seen a segment on "adoption picnics" on *60 Minutes*. I had read about Ashley Rhodes-Courter's disappointment following these events in her memoir, *Three Little Words*. What difference could an event at a video arcade make in the life of a child? As it turns out, it means everything.

Over the years, The Junior League of Tampa has changed the way it researches new projects. Presently, the League focuses on three key areas - education/literacy, basic needs, and foster care - and is committed to making an impact on the lives of women and children in these three areas.

Foster care is the focus area where the League stands out as having a truly comprehensive approach to the issue. Love Bundles are backpacks of emergency supplies given to children at the sheriff's office when they are first removed from their home. A change of clothes, fresh diapers, or toiletries are the only belongings these children have. As they navigate the maze of the foster care system, Kids Connect events provide opportunities for potential parents and children to meet and get to know each other outside of a social worker's office. Since 1996, the Junior League's events have led to 84 adoptions, an average of 7 per year. If a forever family is not found, foster kids aging out of the system receive life skills and essential items for their first apartment through our collaboration with Connected by 25. This program has been so successful that it has become a model for Junior League projects throughout the state of Florida. Out the door of an abusive home, into the arms of a forever family, or unlocking the door to a new apartment - the Junior League is there for these kids

through every phase of their experience in foster care.

Well, what was this Doubting Thomas' reaction to the Kids Connect event? As I stood in the balcony of Gameworks, my eyes filled with tears. The place was packed. How could there possibly be this many children in my community without homes? These were just the kids whose paperwork was ready for the adoption process. What about all the other children in the system? I was overwhelmed.

I went outside for a breath of fresh air to compose myself and noticed a gawky fifteen year old girl leaning against the glass door, looking about aimlessly. She quickly confided in me, "Don't worry. I'm not going to be adopted today. I am just here to see my little sister. We're in different homes. Maybe I can help her get adopted..." Her voice trailed off.

Back inside, a couple took me aside. The wife was too nervous to speak, so her husband was determined to get the job done. "What if we see a child we're interested in? How do we approach him?" he asked me. The prospective parents were just as anxious as the kids, if not more. I thought fast and suggested to engage the child over a video game or skee ball.

It was time to go. I paused, took a deep breath, and looked out over the event once more. Through no fault of their own, these children have ended up in foster care. An event at Gameworks on a Saturday morning is worth it if one child finds parents, or if one mom and dad find a child. Twelve potential matches came out of that Saturday morning. As one League volunteer said so clearly, "This placement makes you feel so blessed for what you have in your life and the importance of what Junior League does for these children. We are creating a future that these children would not otherwise have and that is really inspiring."



Snapshots from The Junior League of Tampa's Foster Care Projects

Mary Lee's House

...On a cold rainy day, a Mary Lee's House employee heard a knock on the door outside her office. Even though it was not the main entrance, she let them in due to the inclement weather. When she took the clients into the "Branches of Hope" Welcome Center (created by The Junior League of Tampa), the children had the usual response of excitement over the toys, craft supplies and oak tree. But, it was the caregiver's response that made the biggest impression. Wet and cold, she was speechless for a moment. Then, she said with awe, "This is the most beautiful room I have ever seen."



Love Bundles

...A young boy's response when he received a Love Bundles' backpack was, "Wow! Tags! Tags!" He jumped up and down. At first the agency coordinator was confused, but then she realized that these were the first brand new clothes the boy had ever received.



Carolyn Eastman

Sustainer Spotlight

By Caroline Rottensteiner



photograph by Dan Weisberg

If you are fortunate enough to walk into Carolyn Eastman's home, you will find watercolors on the refrigerator and photographs throughout her home which showcase her daughters. Carolyn is the proud adoptive mom of two beautiful girls, Natalia age ten and Angelina age seven. Carolyn has been driven to help children in the foster care system, because she knows what it is like to make a way for yourself as a child. As a teenager, Carolyn was placed in foster care after a family crisis. She knows that children "can be greater than the circumstances they are put in. They are resilient." Carolyn feels she was lucky in that she was placed in one loving and caring foster home and did not have to move to many different foster homes. Until recently, it was not unusual that by the time a foster child aged out of care by turning 18, that they would have lived in 17 different foster homes. This means they have to adjust to 17 different schools, communities, peers and care givers. Accordingly, it is hard to succeed in school and form lasting relationships. There are approximately 3,000 children in Hillsborough County's Child Welfare System.

Carolyn is so proud of the League for what they do for children; "the smallest little gesture can make a child feel connected, to know that someone cares. They will remember that gesture for the rest of their lives. I still remember what people did for me as a child." Big or small, the League makes a difference. Carolyn Eastman has been a Junior League member for over 14 years and has enjoyed the lasting friendships and sisterhood she has formed over the years. She serves as inspiration for fellow League members who seek to make an impact in the lives of children. For more than twenty years, Carolyn has been leading communications functions and serving as the Chief Communications Officer for some of Tampa's largest public and private companies including: Tropicana, St. Joseph's Hospital, The Florida Orchestra and Carlton Fields Law firm. She has special expertise in media relations, speechwriting and social marketing for youth advocacy.

Carolyn stays busy raising her two energetic daughters, volunteering at Gorrie Elementary School and serving as Director of Communications for Children's Board of Hillsborough County where she directs the marketing communications department. The Children's Board funds more than 200 agencies and programs that

provide critical services to youth and families in Hillsborough County. The Board is a countywide agency that uses dedicated property tax revenue to promote the health, safety and well-being of Hillsborough County children and families. The agency affects policy and tries to alleviate why problems begin. In the last decade the Board invested \$34 million taxpayer dollars to generate \$201 million new dollars into Hillsborough County. The Board provided a return on investment of almost \$6 for every new dollar directly benefiting children and families. As a member of the agency's Executive Team, Carolyn is responsible for directing agency's communications and public policy initiatives before local, state and national audiences.

One of Carolyn's most collaborative projects is an adoption program called The Heart Gallery, which is operated in partnership with Hillsborough Kids, Inc. The Heart Gallery travels to major community venues including malls, museums and public attractions and is viewed by 350,000 citizens annually. This highly successful program is currently being replicated in 14 cities around the nation. The Tampa Bay Heart Gallery was the first in the nation to feature an interactive multi-media exhibit with audio messages from children waiting to be adopted. It has demonstrated unprecedented success in finding adoptive homes for foster children in our community matching approximately 40 percent of its featured children with potential adoptive families.

The gallery has appeared on national TV including *20/20*, and *Dateline*. In partnership with the Children's Board, the Heart Gallery is the sponsor of the NBC affiliate Channel 10's *Wednesday's Child*. The Tampa Bay Heart Gallery was recently featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show with Tampa adoptive parents, and it made an appearance at the League's 2008 Holiday Gift Market and has been a recipient of the League's Enabling Fund grant in recent years. Eastman began serving at the Children's Board in September 1998.

Carolyn is a recipient of more than 30 awards of excellence in communications, and she received her Bachelor of Arts in Mass



Communications, Magna Cum Laude, minor in Speech Communications and Sociology from the University of South Florida. Carolyn has lived in Tampa for more than 30 years. She feels lucky that she gets to see the many sides of Tampa: the vacation spot and the community that helps its children. She looks forward to the day when child advocacy groups are no longer needed, because all children are placed in loving, caring homes. Carolyn has found her bliss in a career she enjoys and the family she created; she has finally gotten a chance to rediscover being a child again and raise her children in a happy home.

If you or anyone you know is interested in learning more about how to help children in our community, about adoption or would like to get involved please email Carolyn at ceastman@childrensboard.org (or go to www.childrensboard.org).

Sustainer Spring Meeting and Luncheon

**THURSDAY, APRIL 30TH
AT JLT HEADQUARTERS
10:30 A.M.**

HONORING OUR 50 YEAR MEMBERS

Anne Garrison	Lula Richards
Gerry Hunt	Cay Spinadel
Hattie Lenfestey	Connie West
Ruthanne McLean	Dodie Woods

GEUST SPEAKER

J. Roderick Heller III, husband of Tampa native Kay Culbreath Heller, will be sharing his perspective on Carrie McGavock, his great great grandmother and heroine of the best selling novel, *The Widow of the South*.

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Due by April 23rd

JLT Sustainer Spring Meeting,
87 Columbia Drive, Tampa 33606

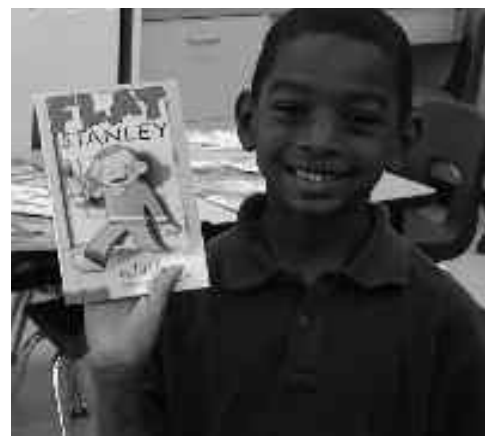
SUSTAINER CALENDER OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|----------|--|
| April 16 | Spring Cocktail Dinner
June Annis Chairman |
| April 30 | Spring Luncheon and Meeting
Joanne Baldy Chairman |
| May 5 | Junior League Annual Dinner and
Sustainer of the Year Award |

Sustainer Bridge Party!



Pictures of the League in Action



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Jake Beckel, CEO, AnazaoHealth

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JLT is Super at Super Bowl XLIII

By Allison Beard Luzier, 2008-2009 JLT Super Bowl Chairman

The Junior League of Tampa (JLT) was honored to play a part in Super Bowl XLIII this past February. JLT supplied 157 volunteers to staff the "NFL On Location" events the day of the game. These events took place pre- and post-Super Bowl, and our volunteers greeted fans and welcomed attendees to the game and to our great city.

In order to participate, all JLT volunteers were required to go through a credentialing process, which involved background screenings and security clearances. Once credentialed, our volunteers were issued all-access passes into Raymond James Stadium for game day. This was no simple task, considering that in addition to all the other staff and volunteers who received credentials for the game, 4,589 members of the media required clearance as well! This incredible amount of press represented a record 633 media organizations from 28 different countries. It is no wonder that the game was broadcast in 34 languages in 230 countries and viewed by 151.6 million people in the U.S. alone. In fact, this year's Super Bowl was the highest rated TV show of all time, and the second highest rated sports show of all time for women viewers (edged out only by the 1994 women's Olympic figure skating championships).

Locally, the Super Bowl made a tremendous impact on Bay Area businesses. 702 buses and 924 limousines were secured



during the weekend. During the game on February 1st, 220 planes were grounded at Tampa International Airport (TIA), 127 of which departed in the initial two hours after the game's conclusion. The following day, 32,500 passengers departed TIA, which is nearly 1/3 more passengers than TIA handles on a normal day. TIA also recorded \$247,411 in food sales, which was a single day record, and 4,600 rental cars were returned, which is more than twice the number returned on a normal day.

I am so proud of our league and our city for coming together to represent all the best of Tampa during this exciting event. And, a very special thanks to all of the JLT members, their families and friends that took part in this volunteer opportunity. It was an honor to serve as JLT's Super Bowl volunteer chair, and everyone's good work and great humor made it all worthwhile!

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Grand Events Ad here (still missing this art)

President Elect: Betsy Graham

Betsy Graham showed intellectual curiosity at an early age. Before she could read, she was memorizing bedtime stories. On more than one occasion, she would correct her father if he stumbled over a word. When he missed a page one evening, she corrected him immediately – he never tried to speed up the bedtime ritual again.

Betsy is the oldest of three children, born in Tacoma, Washington. She lived in San Francisco until the 8th grade and then moved to Greenwich, Connecticut. Her mother was active in the Junior League also. In fact, Betsy's mother served two terms as Treasurer and then went on to be president of her League.

Betsy was the Valedictorian of her high school. She attended Princeton University where she received her degree in History and graduated *summa cum laude*. Upon graduation, Betsy moved to New York City, where she worked as an investment banker in the Public Finance Group for Credit Suisse First Boston. She then went on to obtain her master's degree from Columbia Business School. While at Columbia, Betsy was selected as a Samuel Bronfman Foundation Fellow in Democratic Business Enterprise. The Samuel Bronfman Foundation Fellowship provided her with full tuition for her MBA, as well as a \$500 stipend per semester. This fellowship is awarded to an individual who makes a significant contribution to the progress of industry, to advance the thinking of the community as a whole, and to make it clear to an enlarged section of the free world that individual enterprise plays a vital role in the modern economy.

Betsy graduated second in her class from Columbia University, and during her graduation, she was awarded the Roswell C. McCrea Scholarship. This award recognized her contributions to the intellectual and community life of the school. After graduation from Columbia, Betsy went to work for Coopers and Lybrand's Higher Education Group and conducted reengineering consulting work for large universities.

Betsy met her husband Drew her freshman year at Princeton. Her husband was smitten with her from the first time he met her. Yet, she did not agree to a date



until their sophomore year. When they started talking marriage, Betsy was flexible to move anywhere but Texas or Florida. Drew finds this very funny now, because he does not think there is anything that could make her leave Tampa. Betsy and Drew have three beautiful children ages 10, 8 and 5.

Quoting from her husband, "She is a perfectionist." He admires her passion for excellence and the way she puts her all into any activity she undertakes. He marvels at her organizational skills and her ability to keep numerous balls in the air at once.

Betsy transferred into The Junior League of Tampa from the Boston. Betsy has served on several committees including Arrangements, Seminar, Cookbook, and Children's Literacy where she launched our first Provisional Class Project. She has served on the Executive Committee as Assistant Treasurer and, like her mother, has served two terms as Treasurer. Congratulations to The Junior League of Tampa's President- Elect Betsy Graham!

Kids Connect

Fall Adoption Event, October 18th, 2008

By Sarane Harrell

The Junior League of Tampa's Kids Connect committee hosted its Fall Adoption Event in October. The event was held at Gameworks in Centro Ybor, a location that has been used for the past few events and has proven to be a very successful and popular location. The Kids Connect committee hosts two adoption events each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The events provide an opportunity for potential adoptive parents to meet and interact with children in the foster care system who are in need of permanent homes. The Kids Connect committee partners with Hillsborough Kids who determines the group of children and prospective adoptive parents in attendance. All prospective parents who attend have already been through the screening process and are ready and able to adopt.

Our fall event began with a parent orientation while the children arrived and registered. The prospective parents then rotated through three organized icebreaker sessions. One session was held with each of three separate age groups which allowed the parents an opportunity to meet and briefly interact with each of the foster child in attendance.

After the icebreakers, game cards were distributed, and a lunch buffet was announced. This unstructured time to play games and eat together offered a fun environment for the kids as well as a productive opportunity to build potential relationships with the prospective adoptive parents. After the attendees enjoyed playing games and finished lunch, a raffle was held, giving away "premium prizes" to three children from each of the three age groups. The Kids Connect committee also made sure that each child went home with a "prize" by purchasing backpacks filled with age appropriate games, toys, books and other goodies for each child.

After each event, Hillsborough Kids staff members match children with the prospective adoptive parents who have expressed interest in a particular child or sibling group. The fall event at Gameworks was the most successful to date. In an initial report, Hillsborough Kids anticipates that there will be a minimum of twelve matches, possibly more! Knowing that our events provide a forum for foster children to find a "forever family" makes Kids Connect a very rewarding placement for our members.



Prepare to Capture the Coast!

We are excited to announce that Volume 4 of The Junior League of Tampa Culinary Collection will be titled *Capture the Coast*. Our newest cookbook will capture the true Florida lifestyle, where outdoor entertaining is a way of life, as well as feature fresh, locally-grown ingredients that we have in abundance. It will take our readers on a culinary journey through the West Coast of Florida and include many of the great local foods and flavors that inspire our everyday lives.

From Ruskin tomatoes to red snapper, and citrus to cilantro, our region is blessed by some of the freshest produce and seafood in the country. Complimenting those wonderful ingredients is the unique melding of cultures that we are fortunate to share— from Greek in Tarpon Springs to the Spanish Castilians in West Tampa. This rich heritage has added wonderful depth to the flavors that you can find here.

The West Coast of Florida is a unique place where year-round entertaining with family and friends is our way of life. It is where the crystal waters of the Gulf of Mexico lap at our backdoor, and the balmy breezes of Tampa Bay warm the air, enabling us to enjoy the outdoors nearly twelve months of the year.

It has been a mantra of the entire Junior League of Tampa Culinary Collection to promote our love of casually elegant entertaining. Our affinity for the outdoors also means that we don't want to spend time in the kitchen fussing over pretentious recipes. *Capture the Coast* will reflect this mantra.



Capture the Coast will follow the format of *The Life of the Party*, *EveryDay Feasts* and *Savor the Seasons* and will feature over 100 recipes and 7 different menus in a 9 x 9 hardback format. The cover and menu photos will highlight many of the beautiful water features found in Tampa - from the Gulf to the Bay, from glistening backyard pools to the banks of the Hillsborough River. *Capture the Coast* will take readers on a pictorial voyage through some of the most beautiful settings found anywhere.

Most importantly, this cookbook will enable us to continue the important work of raising money to support the projects of The Junior League of Tampa. Our cookbooks have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars that we have, in turn, been able to invest towards improving the quality of life in our community.

Capture the Coast will be available September 2010!

CAPTURE *the* COAST

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