



WINNING ORGANIZATIONS

WEDU applauds all the unsung heroes of our west central Florida community and congratulates the following organizations on receiving top honors within their respective category. Please visit wedu.org for information about the WEDU Be More Effective Workshop this coming September as well the 2009 WEDU Be More Awards™.

BE MORE INFORMED

Outstanding Achievement in Marketing

THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM

www.ringling.org

A once frail art museum with poor attendance and run-down facilities, the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art exemplifies what it is to think out of the box. After launching a \$50 million dollar endowment campaign in early 2007, the Ringling Museum chose to bypass the atypical route of employing a national advertising agency. Instead, the Museum chose an in-house strategy: to produce and publish its own book entitled "A Museum Once Forgotten: The Rebirth of the Ringling Museum of Art." This 72-page, full-color publication chronicled the Museum's birth, its years of neglect, and its recent renaissance. Likened to a phoenix rising from the ashes, the book publication increased visibility for the Museum through exceeded goals in media placement in local, national, and international publications; increased Museum attendance by more than 20%; and provided the Museum the opportunity to secure two major traveling exhibitions where previously they may have been overlooked. The book, "A Museum Once Forgotten" has more than paid for itself through increased attendance, and museum book store sales. The Art Museum has already had to order a reprint due to popular demand.

BE MORE ENTERTAINED

Outstanding Achievement in Special Events

GIRLS INC. OF SARASOTA COUNTY

www.girlsincsrq.org

Girls Incorporated of Sarasota County inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold. In a community where hundreds of social and fundraising events take place every week, Girls Inc. decided to separate itself from the pack by doing what it does best. The event entitled "This One's For The Girls" – a very appropriate title – this event featured a myriad of components. Hosting more than 800 guests at the Ritz-Carlton Sarasota in March 2007, the event included a young lady served by Girls Inc. seated at each table. Additionally, the event was emceed by a very dynamic 4 foot 8, 10-year-old named Kiana. This young lady not only did an excellent job as the event emcee, she provided a first-hand testimonial of how Girls Inc. has affected her life; a life that had been previously plagued by abuse and drugs - now a life of happiness and peace; a life that every girl deserves. The event included presentations of three awards honoring women in the community who are inspiring girls to be precisely the organization's mission statement...to be strong, smart, and bold. In its 19th year, "This One's For The Girls" was deemed a smash success through increased attendance over the previous year by 27%; increased involvement by the girls within the program, as well as raising more than \$119,000 net dollars – a 38% jump over the previous year.

BE MORE BRILLIANT

Outstanding Achievement in Innovation

THE LITTLE RED WAGON FOUNDATION

www.littleredwagonfoundation.com

After three years of persistence, the Little Red Wagon Foundation finally gets the recognition it deserves. A staff of one makes up the Little Red Wagon Foundation; one little boy who believes that he can make a difference...and he has. Zach Bonner is all of nine-years old, and has his own non-profit foundation. Over the past three years, Zach has helped countless kids just like him; the only difference is that these kids are either homeless or at-risk. Whether it was Hurricane Katrina or a military hospital, Zach organizes and facilitates dozens of events each year by providing kids opportunities to be just that: a kid. Through backpack drives, fundraisers, countless volunteer hours, cookie-parties, celebrity appearances, guide-dog assistance programs - the list goes on and on - this one little boy affects the lives of countless people through thinking out of the box and using his resources. Zach serves as a perfect example that one person can indeed make a difference.

BE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE

Outstanding Achievement in Educational Outreach

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

www.florida4h.org

The University of Florida 4-H Youth Development program empowers our youth to reach their fullest potential through working and learning directly with adults. Through its 4-H / Tropicana Public Speaking program, a program that was developed more than 50 years ago, UF has provided school-aged children an opportunity to develop his or her public speaking skills. Its objective is to assist youth in organizing their thoughts into a cohesive, seamless idea; be self-assured and confident in front of a group while they present their speech, and listen to others comments and assessments as well as respecting their fellow students while they present. In 12 west central Florida counties, the 4-H program is implemented by agents tasked with distributing lesson plans and guidelines to participating teachers. Through a series of classroom competitions, stellar students *(continued on reverse side)*

(continued from previous side) are identified and participate in school-wide, and ultimately county-wide competitions. Through this program that teaches students effective speaking skills, students develop poise and self-confidence...an important and vital skill to possess in today's society. Last year, 95 teachers that participated reported that overall post-assessment scores increased a full point over the previous year; 36% of parents surveyed stated that their child improved their public speaking skills, and 55% of parents said the program helped their child become more confident. Through funding from Tropicana, this program continues to empower our youth to become better educated and more articulate – an invaluable skill to have in today's world.

**COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF SARASOTA
AND MANATEE COUNTIES**
Community Spirit Award

**FAMILY NETWORK ON DISABILITIES OF
MANATEE AND SARASOTA**
www.fndmanasota.org

The Family Network on Disabilities of Manatee and Sarasota provides unique and innovative disability awareness and education programs. This program entitled, "More Alike Than Different," is offered to non-disabled children in kindergarten through 6th grade within the public school system and the Manatee County community. Family Network identified that even in today's progressive society, many children with special needs still experience harassment, bullying, and exclusion by their peers. Misinformation and misconceptions about the disabled still exist and can unfortunately begin at a very young age. Unless fear and uncertainty are corrected with appropriate information and education, individuals will still continue to experience exclusion from overall society. Through the More Alike Than Different program, Family Network aimed to teach young children skills they will need to effectively interact with other of difference thus fostering acceptance of all of their fellow students and peers. Through a variety of hands-on, interactive activities and games that attempted to recreate scenarios that individuals with disabilities might face on a daily basis, Family Network provided children the opportunity to experience a "disability." Since the program's launch three years ago, children in Manatee County have shown a 40 to 50% increase in their knowledge about the disabled. Educators have reported a 78 to 89% increase in students exhibiting a better acceptance and interaction with all of their fellow peers.

BE MORE HUMBLE
People's Choice Award

BIG CAT RESCUE
www.bigcatrescue.org

A two-time winner of the WEDU People's Choice Award, Big Cat Rescue, a non profit educational sanctuary, is devoted to rescuing and providing a permanent home for exotic wild undomesticated cats that have been abused, abandoned, bred to be pets, or retired from performing acts. The organization works to educate the public about these animals and the issues facing them in captivity and in the wild. With their annual Fur Ball fundraising gala as well as their plight to work with legislators to pass laws for exotic cat protection, it is obvious that Big Cat Rescue has truly captured the heart of the community. Receiving more than 31% of the overall total vote, congratulations to Big Cat Rescue on winning the People's Choice Award for the second consecutive year in a row.

BE MORE ENCOURAGED
Judge's Choice Award

LAZYDAYS PARTNERS FOUNDATION
www.ldpf.org

Organizing a foundation solely made up of Lazydays employees, the Lazydays Partners Foundation is funded and managed by the hardworking staff at one the country's largest RV centers. Launched in early 2005, the employees of Lazydays RV Center banded together to form their very own non-profit with a goal to measurably change the lives of children by instilling hope, inspiring dreams, and empowering with education. This Foundation identifies specific needs within our community and applies staff's resources and talents to help fill the void. Through a group of employees called "The Dream Team," employees are encouraged to make annual contributions via a weekly payroll deduction as well as through a pledge program. To date, more than 50% of the Lazydays RV Center staff participates in the contribution program and have pledged more than \$125,000 dollars in support. Through the use of a company match program, the pledge has quadrupled to an astounding \$900,000 which has realized scholarships for more than 50 underprivileged kids who have demonstrated incredible potential, and will fund the construction of the "The Lazydays House"; the area's first emergency shelter for victimized children awaiting foster placement. This just goes to show that the work of a few can indeed affect the lives of many.

BE MORE UNSTOPPABLE
Non-Profit Organization of the Year

THE SPRING OF TAMPA BAY
www.thespring.org

The Spring of Tampa Bay has served more than 30,000 victims of domestic violence since 1977. A beacon of hope for those in desperate situations, The Spring of Tampa Bay's programs and services ensure victims of domestic violence receive safe shelter, support, and empowerment to begin rebuilding their lives. Those who have been helped by The Spring are people just like you and me...those find themselves trapped in volatile situations. Florida's largest domestic violence center, The Spring provided a safe haven for more than eleven hundred women last year relying on more than half of its funding from the local community. Through a series of fundraising endeavors, including the "Celebrity Dancing in Tampa Bay" fundraising event, The Spring has been able to support its vital services for families who suffer from the hands of another. Whether it is your mother, your sister, your aunt, your cousin, your neighbor, or a friend, The Spring saves lives and provides probably the most important thing of all...hope.