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New Children's Garden at YMCA of the Palms sprouts hands-on learning

NAPLES, Fla. (July 1, 2010) – Children who attend the YMCA of the Palms Child Care Center have a new hands-on learning laboratory thanks to a recently completed 2,000-square-foot garden at the Greater Naples YMCA on Pine Ridge. Children through five years old will tend plantings for firsthand knowledge of how plants grow and learn about insects, the seasons and sun. At the same time, they will develop core values when they take on responsibilities such as watering and weeding. Of the 275 children enrolled in the YMCA's Child Care programs, more than 60 percent receive financial assistance made possible by community donors, including the Naples Children & Education Foundation – the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

“The children's garden encompasses the YMCA's three main areas of focus, from youth development to healthy living to social responsibility,” said Brandon Dowdy, CEO of the YMCA of the Palms. “It provides an ever-changing, outdoor classroom for daily exploration that enhances our curriculum in a very tangible, real-world way.”

The garden, which includes tomatoes and zucchini, herbs such as cilantro and rosemary, and flowers that attract butterflies such as pentas and firebush, took shape with the help of 12 volunteers from Goldman Sachs Community TeamWorks in Miami. The volunteers worked in teams named after the YMCA's core values: caring, honesty, responsibility and respect. The teams were spearheaded by members of the YMCA leadership team, and all were cheered on by 50 children from the YMCA's voluntary pre-kindergarten classrooms, who sang a special song. After a few hours, the teams had planted five raised beds with flowers, herbs and vegetables, watered and mulched the garden, and installed four small children's benches along with planting a shade tree. Preparation of the garden layout, soil and irrigation had been completed prior.

“YMCA of the Palms is one of the largest child care providers in Collier County and plays a vital role in serving very young children whose parents could not otherwise afford child care,” said Anne Welsh McNulty, NCEF trustee and 2011 grant chair. “When Goldman Sachs contacted us about Collier County charities in need of volunteers, the YMCA garden project seemed an ideal match for Goldman Sachs Community TeamWorks volunteering program.”

In addition to Goldman Sachs Community TeamWorks, YMCA members and child care family Elisabeth and Jacob Nassberg are supporting the YMCA children's garden. While children will assist in caring for the garden, for ongoing maintenance YMCA is enlisting volunteers, including families of children in the child care program as well as YMCA teachers. More volunteers are needed, and those interested in helping can contact Beth Hatch, director of child care services at bhatch@ymcapalms.org and 597-KIDS (5437).

YMCA of the Palms is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building strong kids, families and communities. YMCAs respond to critical social needs by drawing on their collective strength as one of America's largest not-for-profit community service organizations. Through a variety of programs and services focused on the holistic development of children and youth, family strengthening, and health and well-being for all, YMCAs unite men, women and children of all ages, faiths, backgrounds, abilities and income levels. At YMCA of the Palms, no one is turned away because of an inability to pay. In 2009, YMCA delivered more than \$2.2 million in free, subsidized or sponsored programs to more than 25,000 children, individuals and families, ensuring the availability of YMCA's programs and services to those most in need.

Since 1997, Goldman Sachs has been committed to assisting those in need and the communities around the world through volunteer endeavors and partnerships with nonprofit organizations. Community TeamWorks embodies this commitment and gives our people time off each year to volunteer in team-based projects coordinated with local nonprofit organizations.

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