



Children First Staff Member and Key Supporters Honored at Good Hero Philanthropic Awards



Sarasota, FL (December 17, 2021) – Children First staff member Bonnie Eskell and the agency's entire Diamond Circle were honored for their incredible contributions to our community at the SRQ Good Hero Philanthropic Awards.

As a long-time employee, Bonnie serves as an Early Learning Inclusion Coordinator on the agency's Comprehensive Services team, working to provide support to every child enrolled in the program with a diagnosed disability. Disabilities can include, but are not limited to, developmental delays, autism, or sensory processing disorder. She previously served as site Manager of Children First's main campus, the Dr. Elaine Marieb Center in Sarasota, where she helped lead more than 40 staff in serving nearly 150 children and their families across 11 classrooms.

As part of Children First's 60th anniversary celebration, key supporters came forth with the idea to present a challenge match to our community, resulting in the formation of the Diamond Circle. Their leadership and generosity put forth a challenge of a collective \$1,060,000 that inspired our broader community to raise more than \$2.3MM in support and recognition of the *thousands* of children and families whose life stories have been changed over the past 60 years and continue to be changed as part of the Children First family.

The key philanthropists comprising the Diamond Circle membership include: two anonymous donors providing gifts totaling just over \$300,000; individuals, couples and foundations providing gifts of \$60,000 each including: Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation, Dawn and Mitchell Epstein, Julie and Brock Leach, Joan and Dr. Bart Levenson, Katherine and Frank Martucci, Elenor Maxheim in loving memory of John Maxheim, Keith Monda and Veronica Brady, Leslie and Dick Rivera, Gaye and Jack Schwarz, and Karen Solem in loving memory of Charles Forman; couples joining together to form Diamond Circles with combined gifts from \$20,000 to \$30,000 including: John Bean and Alexandra Jupin, Lisa and John Giglio, Carol and Richard Kalikow, and Bob and Lin Williams; and couples and individuals comprising a Diamond Circle with gifts from \$10,000 including: Alison and Howie Madsen, Jo and Stan Rutstein, Mike Rutstein, and CEO Philip Tavill.

“Bonnie and the members of the Diamond Circle were recognized as ambassadors of the incredible spirit of giving back in our region, as well as for their significant impact in realizing the Children First vision. We are deeply grateful for this steadfast support that keeps our mission moving forward each day,” says CEO Philip Tavill. “Having just celebrated my 25th anniversary in my role as CEO, I’ve had the unique aspect of seeing the incredibly heavy lifting required in maintain our high level of service. Many hands make light work, and Bonnie and our Diamond Circle members are the key drivers that inspire our community to continue going above and beyond for our children and families.”

About Children First:

Founded in 1961 and ranked in the top 1% out of over 1,800 Head Starts nationwide, Children First strengthens children and families by improving the quality of their lives through a comprehensive approach to development, education, health, and well-being. At 15 sites throughout Sarasota County, Children First offers full-day preschool, infant and toddler care, and nutrition and health care assistance to children ages birth to five years old from low-income families. Through Children First, the children receive the social and cognitive skills needed to enter kindergarten and elementary school on track. For more information, call (941) 953-3877 or go to childrenfirst.net.

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