This has been the year of setting key building blocks in place to ensure Grace Place remains the educational touchstone for Golden Gate city for generations. As an organization, we have spent some significant time looking internally and externally to firmly secure these blocks into position. We remain steadfast in our mission to put faith into action – creating pathways out of poverty by educating children and families. We remain committed to educating the entire family, not just the child, as we see the education of the entire family as an essential component to breaking the cycle of generational poverty. We began our year defining our values, which can be found on our website graceplacenaples.org.

In October 2014, Grace Place was approved to become a 21st Century Community Learning Center. This grant provides a comprehensive educational framework for afterschool programs that ensures the design and delivery of academic, physical, emotional and social development for students through the afterschool curriculum.

We also underwent a change of leadership, which required a search committee and careful selection of worthy candidates. After an extensive search, Dr. Tim Ferguson, who has over 30 years of experience as an educator, was selected as our new Chief Executive Officer. He has experience in the classroom and administration, and he is committed to our mission. Our new CEO, along with the Board of Directors, will seek to solidify the organization’s educational continuum and strive to position Grace Place as a respected authority in the areas of family literacy and education.

In addition, Grace Place met its annual fundraising goals to sustain its critical program needs, and we closed the year with a gift that will enable us to build the McNamara Family Learning Center.

In May, we broke ground on the Van Domelen Education Center, which will house four new classrooms and provide welcome office space for our growing team of employees. We are anticipating being able to move into the Van Domelen Education Center before the start of 2016.

Held in April 2015, this year’s A Swing of Grace golf outing was tremendously successful with over $175,000 raised for our educational programs. We are particularly proud that this event significantly exceeds industry standards for revenue to expense ratios. We would like to offer our deepest gratitude to Dick Gast, Chair of A Swing of Grace, and his dedicated committee for their hard work. In addition, Grace Place met its annual fundraising goals to sustain its critical program needs, and we closed the year with a gift that will enable us to build the McNamara Family Learning Center.

Thank you for your generous investments in our educational mission. This is an exciting time for our young nonprofit and we are grateful to do this work in partnership with you.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Furek
Chair, Board of Directors

Dr. Tim Ferguson
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors
Robert Furek
Chair
Phillip Plessinger
Past Chair
Donald Grandi
Vice Chair
Juliana Meek
Secretary
Stanley Russell
Treasurer
Trisha Hare
Geraldine Miller
Kristen Petry
Mario Valle
John Wasmer III
ILL AND JULIA VAN DOMELEN have a long history of giving back to their community. The Bill & Julia Van Domelen Foundation has contributed millions of dollars to help those impacted by the pains of poverty, primarily in Michigan and their southern hometown of Naples, FL.

Mrs. Van Domelen first learned of Grace Place through Christ Child Society, which is a nonprofit, non-denominational association of involved volunteers dedicated to serving underprivileged children in Collier County. While researching the needs in the Golden Gate community, she noted that there was this great organization sitting in her backyard doing so much good for the community, and it was operating largely under the radar.

In this densely populated pocket area of poverty, Grace Place augments the local school system and provides a variety of services to help children and families in need. The Van Domelems were impressed when they came to campus and found such a vibrant, bustling environment. They love the Bright Beginnings program that not only prepares children for kindergarten, but also enables their mothers to become their child’s first teacher through literacy and parenting skills. Aside from our educational programs, they also appreciated the wrap around services we offer with partner nonprofits, such as the free medical and mental health evaluations, and especially the Friday Food Pantry, which is one of the largest in Collier County.

The transformational power of Grace Place was confirmed for Mrs. Van Domeelen during her involvement in the selection of two AP Leaders for the Jubilee Scholarship. She saw how this organization was a game changer for so many people in Golden Gate, and she especially noticed how much was being done with so little. In the midst of portable trailers and limited classroom space, the Van Domelems seized an opportunity to tweak the educational facilities by investing in a new building, which will provide space for four additional classrooms and help secure brighter futures for countless students to come.

The Van Domelems are committed to finding “the biggest bang for their buck” when it comes to helping those in need. They appreciate the efficiency and effectiveness of Grace Place’s efforts to serve the children and families of Golden Gate. They value the building blocks that this trusted organization provides families by helping them become literate in language and life, and ensuring a high graduation rate for the students who are at high risk dropping out of school. They are especially excited for the future of Grace Place. By investing in the helpful hand up that Grace Place extends to the community, the Van Domelems strongly believe they are opening pathways out of poverty for all those seeking a brighter tomorrow.
THE STORY OF NAPLES is increasingly becoming a tale of two cities. People from around the world are moving to the luxurious side of Naples to enjoy its beautiful beaches and pleasant winter weather. In fact, Forbes magazine estimates that the region will experience an annual projected growth rate of 4.6 percent through 2017, which places Naples as the fourth best city for future job growth in America. However, many of these new jobs will employ low-wage, service workers who will live in Golden Gate City, a largely unfamiliar and overcrowded suburb of Naples already beset with economic hardship.

Golden Gate City is currently one of the most impoverished communities in Florida, which Naples Children and Education Foundation (NCEF) identified as one of the highest pockets of need (NCEF, 2010). In fact, Golden Gate City has a higher poverty rate, lower earning, lower family income and higher rates of unemployment than comparative rates for the state of Florida. Furthermore, research connects poverty in childhood and adolescence to higher risk for poor cognitive and academic outcomes, lower school attendance, lower reading and math test scores, increased distractibility, higher rates of grade failure and higher high school dropout rates (CT, 2012). The tale of two cities is also evident in recent graduation rates and proficiency assessments between Golden Gate High School and Gulf Coast High School.

Golden Gate High versus Gulf Coast High Statistics for 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Golden Gate High vs.</th>
<th>Gulf Coast High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percent Proficient in Math</th>
<th>Golden Gate High vs.</th>
<th>Gulf Coast High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>79%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Proficient in Reading</th>
<th>Golden Gate High vs.</th>
<th>Gulf Coast High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>76%</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Collier County Public Schools

Understanding FAMILY LITERACY

PROVIDING QUALITY educational programming that fosters family literacy is critical to closing the achievement gap faced by our community’s children and families. Effective family literacy involves more than knowing how to read and write. However, it consists of multiple literacies across adult, childhood and parent education, and it involves a high degree of interaction between parents and their children.

Without the crucial foundation of family literacy, children and families lack the essential tools to shelter themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty. All the skills parents learn from the educational programming at Grace Place and the experiences they gain by participating in their children’s coursework serve as building blocks to support their ongoing journey toward self-sufficiency and lasting success.
In Bright Beginnings, a Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy partner program, parents engage in activities designed to set the first blocks of family literacy securely in place, so they can successfully guide their children through the crucial years of early development in order to prepare them for kindergarten at a level with their peers.

Parents Matter

According to the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, “Globally, the United States is falling dramatically behind in literacy skills. One in four adults cannot read above a 5th grade level, and research shows the single greatest indicator of a child’s future success is the literacy level of his or her parents.” Our Beginnings 101 and Mom and Tot Literacy are both at all-time enrollment highs with 95 families in Beginnings 101 and 32 families in Mom and Tot Literacy. We educate over 160 individuals each week, and both programs have a waitlist.

BUILDING UPON THE educational foundation formed during Bright Beginnings, parents and their children enter the Academy of Leaders after-school program (grades K – 8), which is designed to increase parental involvement and student success. During the past year, the Academy of Leaders has strengthened its family literacy programming after receiving funds from 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grant, which supports academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend low-performing schools serving a significant number of households with low income.

Parents of actively participating 21st CCLC students engage in a variety of services to secure a solid educational framework for their children. Parent Involvement specialists work closely with the adult family members and our teachers, staff and school partners to ensure a high level of family participation and integration into the school environment. Ongoing citizenship and financial literacy classes are also provided for parents, plus they are invited attend a series of parenting classes, which employ an internationally-recognized, group-based approach for working with parents and their children in reducing dysfunction and building healthy, positive interactions.

School Age: Academy of Leaders

National Dropout Prevention Center Findings

Participating students (in quality after-school programs) demonstrated increased achievement, regular attendance, good behavior, and a reduction in grade retention. Those at-risk students in the lowest quartile on standardized test scores and English Language Learners showed the greatest improvement. Students also showed improved social skills and behavior which resulted in fewer disciplinary incidents at school and fewer suspensions.
**School Age: Academy of Leaders SUMMER PROGRAM**

“I found the reading challenge to be a wonderfully organized and fun program. I worked with small groups playing word or number games to reinforce what they had already learned in school and perhaps even to teach them a few new things. This was a valuable experience for the children and it prepared them very well for the challenges of the next level in school.”

– Rebecca Knowles, Grace Place Volunteer

**To help students maintain their academic skills, and avoid learning loss due to the effects of summer slide, the Academy of Leaders Summer Program offers programming centered on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), along with academic enrichment activities such as the summer reading lab and reading challenge. STEM-centered programming includes in-depth, hands-on projects such as robotics, filmmaking, digital journalism and career field trips to local businesses. Students in the reading lab were supervised and instructed by a certified teacher. They utilize a program called Reading Horizons and learned to use volunteers to strengthen literacy skills by working on reading games. During the inaugural reading challenge this past summer, our 164 elementary and middle school students read an impressive 997 books combined. The challenge not only improved our students’ reading skills, it also helped parents and their children create a fertile environment for literacy in their homes.”

**HE AP LEADERSHIP PROGRAM** (grades 9 – 12) forms the keystone of our family literacy efforts at Grace Place. AP Leadership students receive individualized academic counseling, and the program offers parents guidance for navigating their child through high school graduation and into the early years of collegiate education.

AP Leadership is a three-tiered program, which encompasses all high school grade levels and incorporates research-based elements of proven highly effective programs: leadership development, service learning, college access and preparation, mentorship and parental involvement. All AP Leadership students engage in work-study activities through which they not only serve as teaching assistants and activity aides, but also gain valuable in-work-study leadership, collaboration and responsibility.

Parents of AP Leadership students attend mandatory meetings at the beginning of the school year, plus they participate in a financial aid seminar in January. They are also encouraged to accompany their child on college tours and field trips.

“I feel very lucky to have been part of Grace Place. Their programs support students and uplift the whole community. I left a great organization feeling confident and prepared to begin a new chapter of my life at Florida Gulf Coast University. Grace Place helped me achieve my full potential by giving my family and me the tools we needed for lifelong success.”

– Tony Guarino IV, Grace Place AP Leader Alumnus

**AP Leaders 100 percent Graduation Rate**
HOUSEHOLDS SUFFERING FROM food insecurity are more likely to have children who suffer from anemia; lower nutrient intakes; greater cognitive problems; higher levels of aggression and anxiety; higher probabilities of being hospitalized; poor general health; higher probabilities of dysthymia and other mental health issues; higher probabilities of asthma; higher probabilities of behavioral problems; and more instances of oral health problems.

Residents of Golden Gate City live in a food desert. Major grocery chains remain outside this community, so many families rely on smaller local and ethnic food stores, which typically mark up costs and carry fewer fresh produce items. In the past year, Grace Place provided more than 350,000 pounds of food including dairy, meat, and fresh produce, which demonstrates the area’s desperate need for nourishment and health, which is essential for effective learning.

UR ADULT EDUCATION program is designed to promote family literacy and serve the general educational needs of adults in the Golden Gate community. In addition to the support provided through our early childhood and school-aged programs, Grace Place currently offers adult learners courses in English Language Learning (ELL), financial literacy and citizenship. These valuable courses help people pursue paths leading to greater success for themselves and their families. Over the past year, 214 adult students have attended the Adult Education programs at Grace Place. Of the ten students enrolled in the citizenship class, three have been granted their US citizenship, and all students in the ELL program have improved their literacy skills by at least 1.5 grade levels as shown by the CASAS “Life and Work Reading” exam.

FRIDAY FOOD PANTRY

When I started taking English classes at Grace Place four years ago, I was new to the language. At work, they started me out mowing lawns, but I moved up to mechanical assistant and was promoted again to work with irrigation because I spoke a little more English than my coworkers. I need more practice speaking, but I hope to run my own body shop someday, and I strongly feel that the skills I learn at Grace Place will help me reach my goal.”

– Benjamin Hernandez, Adult Education Student

Effects of Hunger on Academic Achievement

Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten (ECLS-K) Cohort, which followed more than 21,000 children from kindergarten through third grade, showed that by the third grade, children who had been food insecure in kindergarten had lower reading and mathematics scores than their peers who had not been food insecure in kindergarten.

Of every dollar invested at Grace Place, 92 cents goes directly into programs providing pathways out of poverty for the children and families of Golden Gate City.
“Having the opportunity to work with the children at Grace Place has been such a blessing. I feel like it has been positive experience for our school, the experience of volunteering with these young people has had an even bigger impact on me.”

ROGER THOMAS

education changes everything.

Grace Place puts faith into action – providing pathways out of poverty through education.