

# GRACE PLACE

FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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BACK TO SCHOOL  
NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2023 ◀



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# Back to School Bash

## Students are Ready for the School Year

The families of Golden Gate could be seen lining up as early as 6 a.m. on Saturday, July 22, for the annual **Grace Place Back to School Bash**. Over 1,100 individuals flocked to campus to claim their free backpacks, chock full of school supplies. **Over 650 backpacks** (that's 5,000 lbs. of much-needed school supplies) **were distributed that day**. From single backpack donations to deliveries by truck, our Grace Place followers rallied to make our backpack drive in June and July a huge success.

The Back to School Bash was not just all about backpacks, families who attended learned more about all the Grace Place programs and toured our campus. Everyone indulged in a pancake breakfast, snow cones, and popcorn. Plus, students chose from a wide assortment of donated books, had their vision checked and met our partners including the Naples Zoo, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, the Collier County Sheriff's Office, and more.

Studies show that children having their school supplies provided can improve grades, creativity, attitudes toward learning, behavior, peer relationships, and self-image. Education is the first step to overcoming poverty. A single pack of pencils and paper can help lead to a promising year. Our students are able to put their best foot forward knowing that someone cares about their academic success.



Thank you to the more than 30 volunteers who came together to ensure every child who attended the event left smiling with their backpacks in hand. Thank you again to all who donated.

**Mark your Calendars:** The 2024 Back to School Bash is **Saturday, July 20**.

**Grace Place is looking for a Sneaker Sponsor for next year's Back To School Bash.** If you know someone who is interested, please have them contact [Colleen.Durham@graceplacenaples.org](mailto:Colleen.Durham@graceplacenaples.org).

**“Alone, we can do so little;  
together, we can do so much.”**

– Hellen Keller



# Swinging FORE Grace

A Swing of Grace Was SOLD OUT



Bob Kinsella, Lara Fisher, Jim Bosscher, Jim Wilson

The results are in and the **2023 A Swing of Grace (ASG)** was SOLD OUT and a resounding success. Participants raved about the Bonita Bay Golf Club and enjoyed playing on its two beautiful courses. The amazing ASG committee led by Co-Chairs Nita Rapp and Cesar Taveras did outstanding raising over \$302,000 for Grace Place. Thank you to everyone who bid on items at our auctions and donated to our Fund a Need.

Mark your calendars for **Tuesday, May 7, 2024**, we will be back at the beautiful Bonita Bay Golf Club.



Tony Westbrook, David Rapacciuolo,  
John Buehler, Todd Shelbaugh

## Congratulations Golfers:

### Winners Bay Island Course

David Gordley  
Paul Belfore  
Jaime Zabla  
Carl Santos-Ocampo

### Winners Marsh Course

Brett Backus  
James Nulf  
Bill Price  
Tim Byall

### Long Drive and Closest to the Pin Winners:

#### Men's Long Drive:

Ed Canterbury and Finlay Whitee

#### Ladies Long Drive:

Beth Davis and Suzi Liguori

#### Men's closest to the Pin:

Jack Collage and Tony Westbrook

#### Ladies closest to the Pin:

Becky Born and Sue Rebeiro

### Thank You to Our Sponsors:

- Fifth Third Bank
- Pat and Jim Bosscher
- First Horizon
- The Lutgert Companies
- Brian and Heidi Miller
- Cathy Morton and Don Dion

- Nancy and Russell Peterson
- Conditioned Air
- Lisa and Ken Ewell
- Diane and Mike McGrath
- Diamond Custom Homes
- Keith and Marta Cody
- Investment Professionals for Charities

# A Closer Look At Marcie Curry, Ed.D.

## From the Windy City to the Paradise Coast

### Chief Program Officer, School Age After-school Programs



Marcie Curry is making an impact on the lives of youth. “Our holistic programming and location in Golden Gate make us truly unique from other education programs”, said Marcie Curry. “Students who live here understand that we are able to offer the support they need for academic success,” she added. “Families in Golden Gate experience unique barriers, and we meet those needs holistically by giving them the tools they need---whether it’s English classes, early childhood education, tutoring, financial literacy, or food; we want to meet needs.”

Marcie began her journey in Ohio, receiving her undergraduate degree in secondary education from Cedarville University. She worked as a high school English teacher. When asked why she chose to pursue a career in education, she said, “I have always been an avid reader, so it seemed like a logical next step to teach English.”

In 2000, Marcie and her husband Bill Curry left Ohio for Chicago, where they were hired as the first two educators for the youth organization Breakthrough. With little background in Urban youth programs, they accepted the challenge to launch Breakthrough’s youth development program. The program started

with Marcie and Bill working with 15 youth, and grew to over 40 staff, over 1,200 youth and programs in academic support, community sports, art classes, and STEM.

If that was not impressive enough, while raising three children, Marcie received a Master’s degree in educational leadership from Roosevelt University and a Doctorate degree in educational leadership from Concordia University. She then added the title of Adjunct Professor to her resume, teaching classes at three universities.

At Grace Place, she is focused on “blending a wealth of experience while honoring the past and remaining future-focused on the next chapter for Grace Place.

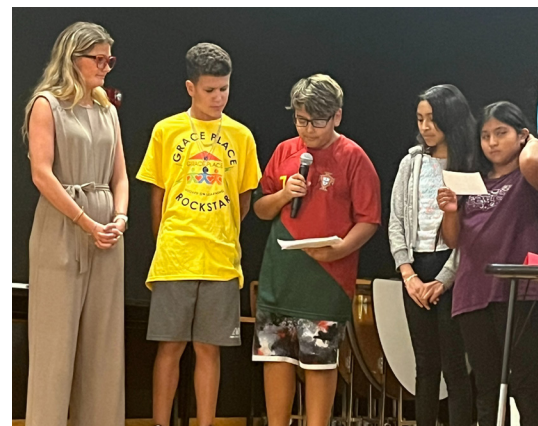
What stood out to her about Grace Place that made her want to join the team was the success of the family literacy model and the tag line of “Education Changes Everything”. These things made Grace Place the right place for her next chapter.

**“Living and working in an urban community for over 20 years has given me good insight into the importance of diversity. I value that experience because that is something you cannot learn in a textbook.”** – Marcie Curry



# The Power of CHOICE Academies

## Motivating Middle School Students



In schools and classrooms across the country, there is a powerful argument to provide more student self-selection across every grade level: reducing one-way learning, increasing problem-solving and placing more responsibility firmly in the hands of students.\*

Grace Place believes in the importance of choice to engage and empower our students. This is especially important for our middle school students, grades 6-8. For many of these students, they have reached an age to decide for themselves what they want to do after school and choose whether they want to continue with the Grace Place after-school program.

This is where the powerful impact of the **Grace Place Choice Academies** comes into play. Every seven weeks, students choose one of six academy-focused areas that they want to join and work with industry professionals in project-based experiences that culminate in a final showcase. Incorporating these choice-based, career learning opportunities provides middle schoolers with the extra motivation they need to continue their learning outside of the regular school day.

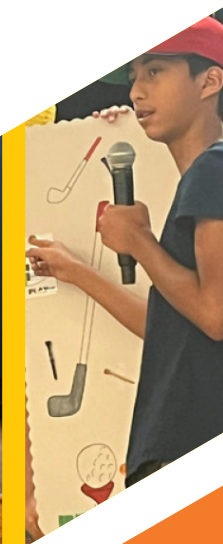
This past year, Grace Place partnered with The United Arts Council, Naples United Football Club, The First Tee of Collier, SWFL Blazers, and FGCU Water School. Given some students are more interested in the arts and athletics, the Choice Academy also includes chess, culinary arts, basketball, painting, leadership, water ecology, and soccer.

*\*Motivation and Engagement in Student Assignments:  
The Role of Choice and Relevancy. Equity in Motion.*

### Have an idea for a Choice Academy?

Want to be a volunteer to teach or judge an Academy? Contact

[Josh.Edel@graceplacenaples.org](mailto:Josh.Edel@graceplacenaples.org).



# Congratulations Grace Place Seniors!

## The Numbers Speak for Themselves



Our full-ride Scholarship awardees Dieunica, Jeffery, Izual, Adriana

The 12 high school seniors in the LEAD program received 31 acceptances to 19 different colleges and universities. Four seniors were awarded full ride scholarships through Grace Place Opportunity and L. Maynard Oss scholarships.

Four days per week, **LEAD** offers academic support, leadership skills, mentorship, and college or career readiness for high school students at Golden Gate High School.

Here is what a few of them had to say:

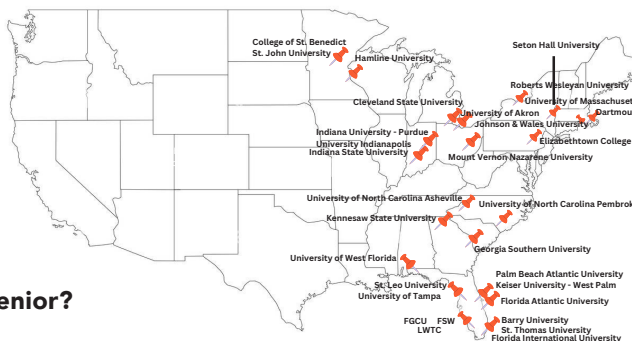
**Dieunica Dorilus** – “Grace Place provides a supportive space and allows me to get my homework done. I also get help when I need it. Belonging to the program inspired me to continue my education and create a better future for myself. It helped me understand what I needed to get done. We participated in ACT prep and practiced interview skills.”

**Derrick Vicente-Gomez** – “Grace Place helped me develop and draft my essay for college applications. I learned about colleges with programs I wanted to study. The after-school program provided me with time to complete my homework.”

**Joshua Dieujuste** – “Grace Place has been an immense help to me with finding good colleges that match my interests. I have been pushed to give more attention to the work. I have learned to focus and prioritize.”



## College Acceptances



Want to be a mentor to a high school junior or senior?

Contact [Mendy.Martinez@graceplacenaples.org](mailto:Mendy.Martinez@graceplacenaples.org).



# The Story of a Bright Beginnings Student

## From Venezuela to Golden Gate by Lighia Uzcategui



**I came to the United States from Venezuela two years ago with my husband Rafeal, son Liam who was three years old at the time, and my sister Mayra. We chose to come here for security reasons. In Venezuela, I was an architect.**

I heard about the Family Literacy program from my sister Ulisbel who was already a Grace Place student. I was very interested because I had the opportunity to attend English classes for free. I knew it was important that I learn English because I could not be an architect without English skills. I spoke with my husband Rafeal, who works as an electrician. He was very supportive and encouraged me to participate so that I could further my career as an architect in the states.

When I came to Grace Place, I did not know any English. I have been in the Bright Beginnings program for seven months and I have benefited greatly from the ESL. When I came to Grace Place, I felt insecure because I wasn't sure if I would be able to learn quickly enough. After the first week, I began to feel more confident. I love my teacher, Ms. Nancy. She made me feel confident and sure of myself, but still pushed me out of my comfort zone which forced me to use English in new ways.



Today, I watch movies in English, and have English apps on my phone. Most important, I am confident speaking to people in English and proud of the growth I have seen in myself.

Liam attends the Early Childhood Education program. When he started at Grace Place, he did not speak English either. Today, he knows all his letters and can count to 100. He can write his name and always orders his own McDonald's Happy Meals himself.

I plan to continue learning English and ultimately work in the field of architecture. As for Liam, he is in summer camp at Grace Place and is starting kindergarten at Calusa Park Elementary School. We plan for him to go to college. I read to Liam every night in English. One way to strive to achieve our goals is by reading together every night...in English.

*\*\*As a student in our Bright Beginnings 201 program (B201), Lighia attended Grace Place four times per week and participated in a curriculum that included intensive English classes, digital literacy, wellness, and life skills.*



# Their First of Many Graduations Walks

## A Salute to Bright Beginnings Graduates

### A sea of little blue caps and gowns (22 to be exact),

on top of giant smiles, surrounded by a crowd of proud parents set the scene for one of the happiest days of the year at Grace Place – the Bright Beginnings™ Pre-K Graduation ceremony.

Parents and grandparents lined the walkways of Grace Place, shared in cheers and shed some tears (of joy) as they watched their children proudly attend their first graduation ceremony and receive their Bright Beginnings diploma. Equally as proud were our Bright Beginnings program teachers. **Congratulations to our teachers, Josiah Barbee, Adriana Estevez, Maria Franco, and Yanett Gonzalez, on a job well done!**

These Bright Beginnings graduates are sure to take Kindergarten by storm this year!

*\*\*\*\*Bright Beginnings ensures that our four-year-old students are demonstrating kindergarten readiness with skills in the domains of language, literacy, and mathematics as well as physical, social and cognitive areas.*

Contact [Stacey.Vaughn@graceplacenaples.org](mailto:Stacey.Vaughn@graceplacenaples.org)  
to make a donation to help fund the  
future education of our youngest learners.



# It Takes a Village

Meet Adult Education & Food Pantry Volunteer Lou Villani



**Lou Villani is a retired, Golden Gate school teacher and current volunteer at Grace Place:**

## **How long have you been at Grace Place and what departments do you volunteer for?**

"I have been at Grace Place for about a year. This summer I am volunteering with the Food Pantry and the Adult Education programs."

## **Why did you first want to volunteer at Grace Place?**

When Grace Place first opened in 2004, I was teaching in the Collier Public School system and immediately saw how dedicated the Grace Place team was. I was constantly getting feedback from the after-school program at Grace Place asking how their students were doing in class and if there was anything specific, I wanted them to work on. As I watched Grace Place grow and develop, I always said to myself, "If I ever get the chance, I am going to volunteer at Grace Place." Once I retired, that is exactly what I did.

## **What part of The Grace Place Mission/Vision most resonates with you?**

"The fact that there is a Family Literacy Model. I witnessed this firsthand as a teacher in the Golden Gate. I would have conferences with parents and could see how uncomfortable they were, because they did not understand English. This led to many of them avoiding meetings with me about their children. This program resonates with me as it teaches parents the importance of education and the ability for parents and youth to read, write and speak English."

## **What would you tell someone who was considering volunteering at Grace Place?**

"That is easy, I have told many people to volunteer, and I have told them 'Why'. There are a variety of different programs you can work on regardless of your skillset or background. There is always something happening here, and events you can get involved in."

**Lou is a great example of a volunteer who works in more than one area at Grace Place. To learn more about volunteering, contact Colleen at [Colleen.Durham@graceplacenaples.org](mailto:Colleen.Durham@graceplacenaples.org). Remember – no experience is necessary and training is FREE!**



# TGI Food Pantry

## Feeding Families in Collier County



Fridays are usually everyone's favorite workday for obvious reasons, but they mean something extra special at Grace Place, it is our Free Choice Food Pantry. With the help of more than 20 weekly volunteers, Marco Barroso, COO, and his team can be seen setting up the weekly Food Pantry as early as 8 a.m.

Our staff and volunteers are here, rain or shine, with the scorching Florida summer temperatures, completing a variety of tasks needed prior to opening the pantry to feed approximately 500 families each week. This is all done in the name of fighting food insecurity in the Golden Gate community. Food pantries across the nation are predicted to face problems due to inflation.

We spoke with one of our Bright Beginnings alumnae, Isabel Martinez, who is a shopper at our Grace Place Food Pantry. She and her three daughters, Carolina (16), Karina (12), and Isabella (9), have each gone through our Bright Beginnings Family Literacy™ program and are enrolled in our after-school programs. Isabel, like many of our adult students, has seen the effects of inflation when buying groceries for her family.

"Basic necessities like milk and eggs have tripled in price. I find myself having to constantly make the difficult decision of what nutritious foods we must sacrifice due to our strict budget for groceries every week, along with the stress of paying other bills. Thanks to the food pantry, we have an array of healthy options for our meals. The meals provided to my girls in the after-school programs have also been a great help and relief to our weekly grocery spending." said Isabel.

We have seen the effect food insecurity has had on many of our students across our programs. We are proud to report that we have helped provide an **incredible 579,113** pounds of food in the last year, including fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy products, to people facing hunger in our community.

**"Thanks to the food pantry at Grace Place, we have an array of healthy options for our meals."**

– Isabel Martinez

Volunteers are often needed. Contact Colleen at  
[Colleen.Durham@graceplacenaples.org](mailto:Colleen.Durham@graceplacenaples.org)





# Mark Your Calendar

**COMING  
SOON**

- **3rd Annual Tree Lighting festivities: Friday, December 1, 2023**
- **A Swing Of Grace Golf Tournament 2024: Tuesday, May 7, 2024**
- **20th Anniversary Celebration: Friday, December 6, 2024**

## Grace Place is Going Green and Going Online

Grace Place is also making an effort to reduce. At the beginning of the summer, we installed five water bottle filling stations.

To streamline communications, help the environment and ensure the maximum amount of our donations go to programs, Grace Place is working to move all communications online by the end of 23.24 school year. **This all starts with you providing Grace Place with your email.**

You can quickly and easily subscribe to ALL Grace Place communications online, by scanning this QR Code:



### Daily Dose of Grace Place:

Stay up to date about all the exciting activities and achievements at Grace Place by following us on our social channels. "Like" and "Share" our posts to help spread the word about all the magnificent work we do.



[www.instagram.com/graceplacenaples](https://www.instagram.com/graceplacenaples)



[www.facebook.com/GracePlaceNaples](https://www.facebook.com/GracePlaceNaples)



[www.linkedin.com/company/graceplacenaples/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/graceplacenaples/)

Or email **Kim Buehler** at **Kim@graceplacenaples.org** with the subject RE: Email Update and your full name and phone number in the body of the email, **OR** you can call Kim at 239.255.7219.