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Helping foster teens transition to adulthood

BY CHRIS MAYO
The Miami Herald

M.A.P.S., short for "Mentor, Attorney and Peer Support," is a program that brings together the nonprofit group Lawyers For Children America and former foster care youth to provide advocacy and mentoring to current foster teens who will soon age out of the system.

The law firm of Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod recently welcomed new M.A.P.S. participants and generously donated computers to all of the foster teens who are currently involved in the project. These computers will enable recipients to conduct research, navigate the Internet, complete school assignments and build additional skill sets that will assist them in future career planning.

The firm also hosted a reception and networking event, which kicked off the M.A.P.S. program following the receipt of a large grant from the Dade Community Foundation Safe Passage Initiative, and additional support from the Women's Fund of Miami Dade County.

Through its Bilzin Sumberg Cares initiative, the firm continues to pledge its commitment to the positive development of the South Florida community. In 2008, the firm was honored by LFCA with the John Edward Smith Child Advocacy Award, which was presented to law firms that demonstrate a strong commitment to providing pro bono services to LFCA.

For more information, visit www.bilzin.com.

BE A CUPCAKE

The Epilepsy Foundation of Florida, which serves as a lead advocate for the rights and needs of people with epilepsy in Florida, has launched a new "Be A Cupcake: Buy a Cupcake for Epilepsy" campaign to raise awareness and funds to serve the 360,000 Floridians currently diagnosed with the neurological condition and other seizure disorders.

The goal of the campaign is to sell 360,000 real and/or virtual cupcakes beginning in November, which is National Epilepsy Awareness Month, through Valentine's Day 2011. This represents one cupcake for each child and adult living with epilepsy in Florida.

The foundation has teamed up with numerous "cupcakeries," bakeries and other partners to sell special cupcakes and to provide cupcakes for hundreds of bake sales across the state. Bake sales will be hosted at schools, houses of worship, community events and in retail partners such as Wal-Mart, Old Navy, Williams-Sonoma and others, with proceeds going to support the foundation's services.

The Epilepsy Foundation also is encouraging students, employers and employees, and any

group or individual to host a cupcake sale to support the Be A Cupcake campaign.

“We all know how popular cupcakes are right now, and we're very excited that so many partners are teaming up with us on this brand new campaign for a great cause,” said Karen Basha Egozi, the foundation's chief executive officer. “If we sell one cupcake for each Floridian diagnosed with epilepsy, we've raised valuable funding to serve these families, friends and neighbors that much more.”

In addition to buying and selling real cupcakes, supporters can buy virtual cupcakes on the foundation's website or Facebook fan page. The foundation is encouraging supporters to send virtual cupcakes for only \$1 each to friends, family and colleagues. For a list of Be A Cupcake bakeries or to participate in the campaign, visit www.EpilepsyFLA.org or go to the group's Fan Page at www.facebook.com.

Supporters can also donate to the campaign by texting BRAIN to 52000 to buy five cupcakes, a \$5 contribution, to support EFOF services.

HISPANIC CHAMBER

Anyone interested in learning more about the South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is invited to join the group for its annual holiday membership luncheon from noon-2 p.m. Dec. 3 at Casa Juancho Restaurant, 2436 SW Eighth St. The cost is \$45 for members and \$65 for nonmembers. Reservations are requested by Nov. 30. Call 305-534-1903.

The organization is hosting a benefit drive for Centro Mater which serves 1,100 needy children. SFLHCC Members are asked to bring unwrapped toys, canned foods, clothes and or gift cards to the luncheon or drop them off at the office at 333 W. 41st St., Miami Beach. Donations can also be dropped off at any US Century Bank branch, and at La Poderosa Radio Station, 330 SW 27th Ave.

“The South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has been supporting local charities during the holidays, and for the past 10 years one of them was the Miami Rescue Mission Center for Women and Children. They will continue to receive donations from us, but we have grown this event thanks to so many companies' support. Therefore, this year, the drive will include the five locations of the Centro Mater,” said Chamber president Liliam M. Lopez.

NEW NEIGHBORS CLUB

This club, made up of community-focused residents in South Dade, began as a “Welcome Wagon” with members distributing baskets of gifts and offers from local merchants. The New Neighbors Club of South Dade will mark its 61st anniversary with a lunch at 11:30 a.m. on Dec. 8. Members will celebrate at a new meeting home, the Coral Gables County Club, 997 N. Greenway Dr.

“We are very excited about our decision to move to Coral Gables Country Club. The renovations are spectacular and we are proud to be the first women's club to sign a contract with the new owners. After an exhaustive search we have found our new home where the club will not miss a beat, and our members will continue to enjoy monthly luncheons and programs,” said New Neighbors President Margaret Jones.

The club has changed into a multi-faceted organization offering many activities to members. All gatherings are aimed at helping create community awareness and aiding members in making new friends. Join the celebration that includes a holiday bazaar and bake sale featuring homemade goodies. Entertainment will be performed by Jamie Perez, choir director of Old Cutler Presbyterian Church, with keyboard accompanist Derek Fairholm. In celebration of the 61st anniversary members of 15 years or more will be honored.

Monthly luncheons are open to guests and visitors. Reservations are required. Call Barbara Richards at 305-595-8631 by

Dec. 1. The cost is \$24 and includes free parking.

HOLIDAY HOUSE TOUR

The Villagers will present "A Vintage Day by Biscayne Bay" from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Dec. 3. This holiday house tour is presented annually. Included are a quilt raffle, boutique, and light refreshments. Tickets cost \$30, are tax-deductible, and must be purchased by Nov. 23. Call 305-274-9881 for details.

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