



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Barbara Mainster to Receive the Prestigious Chiles Advocacy Award

Children's Week honors Barbara Mainster for her long-standing dedication to public service benefiting Florida's vulnerable children and their families.

Immokalee, Florida - RCMA (formerly Redlands Christian Migrant Association) is pleased to announce that Barbara Mainster, former Executive Director, will be presented with Florida's top child advocacy award in Tallahassee. The ceremony will take place on March 25, 5:00 p.m. at Florida State University Center Club during the Children's Week celebration.

The Chiles Advocacy Award, named in honor of former Governor Lawton Chiles and First Lady Rhea Chiles, commemorates dedication to public service and commitment to the children of our State. The award is presented each year to a Floridian whose leadership is recognized for promoting policies and programs that improve the lives of Florida's children and their families.

Barbara Mainster grew up modestly on a farm. "My parents ... wanted to be independent...raise their own cows. They never made a lot of money on that farm, but the milk they sold put us through college." Mainster recalls. She studied anthropology at Cornell University, joined the Peace Corps and was stationed in Peru to work in a small preschool. "I had never taught before," she said. A cherished experience there was her adoption of a child set to enter an orphanage "I took a look at that orphanage and said 'no way.'"

With an engaging smile, passionate energy and articulate speaking ability, Barbara has been the voice and a force to reckon with for improving the quality of life of Florida's migrant farmworkers and their families. Joining RCMA in 1972, Mainster was responsible for educating migrant farm women and transforming them into exceptional caregivers. Since then her advocacy has focused on issues of living conditions, early childhood development, health care, decent housing, fair treatment of women, the elderly, education, and of course, the children.

Barbara's powerful public service efforts over 40 years drove the organization's vision and transformed RCMA into Florida's largest non-profit child care service and education center for the migrant and rural low-income children.

With 75 children in three centers in the early '70s, RCMA now serves over 7,000 children across Florida in 70 centers, and 3 top-rated charter schools with acclaimed math and dual language programs.

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"I remember one year that we doubled our services from 16 child care centers to 32," said Gyla Wise, RCMA's Senior Advisor. "Barbara was very good at talking to people, activating others to engage and to bring their own power to bear."

Under her leadership, RCMA has become a national model success story. Mainster delivers a powerful and persuasive message to lawmakers, leaders in corporate agriculture, civic and professional organizations alike. She's known in Washington D.C. and Tallahassee for her moving testimonials before congressional and legislative committees where she championed Migrant Head Start funding. Mainster's expertise is still sought out by childcare and farmworker oversight groups across the country.

"Barbara has been an inspiring leader," said Gary Wishnatzki, owner of Wish Farms, a top quality berry producer in Florida and RCMA Board Member. "She has a unique ability to bring together the community she serves with the agricultural industry leaders. Barbara's ability to forge alliances, is one of her greatest assets."

"Of course, Barbara did not work alone, but every movement needs a leader whose integrity, intelligence, and inspiring example give others the confidence to engage and the hope to endure," said Jack Levine, advocate ally and Founder of the 4Generations Institute.

Mainster is a former President of the Florida Children's Forum; served as Vice Chair on the Governor's Advisory Council on Farmworker Affairs and has been appointed to the Florida Farmworker Housing Coalition by then Gov. Jeb Bush. Mainster now serves on Florida's Reading and Literacy Partnership Committee and is charter board member for the Socially Accountable Farm Employers (SAFE) program. In 2016 Mainster retired as Executive Director of RCMA and remains active as Board Member of our organization.

For more information about Barbara Mainster and RCMA please visit www.rcma.net

For details about the upcoming Chiles Award Ceremony please visit www.childrensweek.org

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