



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **The First Five Years Gala Shows Continued Growth in Community Support**

*Organization raises more than \$10 Million in Matching Funds since Gala's inception.*

**ORLANDO, FL** (June 15, 2016) – Saturday, June 11, 2016, more than 380 business and community leaders attended The First Five Years Gala, held at the Epcot's World Showplace Pavilion. This is the [Early Learning Coalition of Orange County's](#) (ELCOC) sixth and most successful gala raising 145,021. Combined with the federal match of \$15.67 per each dollar raised, an estimated \$2,272,483 will go toward providing access to high-quality early care and education for our community's young children.

"We are receiving more and more support from our community and local businesses because access to early education affects us all," said Karen Willis, CEO of the ELCOC. "Businesses recognize that many of their employees are parents and employees are most productive when they know their children are cared for in safe, early education environments.

How child care affects workplace productivity:

- U.S. Companies lose \$3 billion annually as a consequence of child care related absences (Child Care Action Campaign Data)
- Forty-nine percent of employers reported that child care services helped boost employee productivity (Child Care Partnership Project 2007)
- Employers reported that child care services decrease employee absences by 20-30 percent and reduce turnover by 37-60 percent (Child Care and Parent Productivity, 2004)

Every year, The ELCOC recognizes community leaders who use their influential platform to improve the lives of children with the Toni Jennings Early Learning Champion Award. This year, Dick Batchelor and Tico Perez were both recognized for their support as the co-hosts of The First Five Years Gala since its inception 2011.

"I had the honor of serving on the board for several years prior to being asked to help with the Gala," said Tico Perez, Shareholder at Gunster, Yoakley & Stewart, P.A. "When I was approached, knowing the importance of early learning, the value of the program and the successes it derives, there's no way to say no."

Since 2011, The First Five Years Gala has raised more than \$10 million dollars impacting more than 26,000

children annually. The Coalition provides safe, affordable, early care and education programs each year through early education centers and homes contracted with the Early Learning Coalition of Orange County.

"What's important are the children being taught in the early education programs," said Dick Batchelor, President of Dick Batchelor Management Group (DBMG), Inc. "But we must also remind people that there are a number of children in our community who really need to be in these programs too."

Walt Disney World serves as the title host for the event. Other lead sponsors include, Florida Hospital, Orlando Health, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Orlando Magic, Publix Super Markets Charities, Bags, Inc., CenturyLink, Community Coordinated Care for Children (4C), Fringe Benefits Plans, Inc., Florida Technical College, LongHorn Steakhouse, Rosen Hotels and Resorts, University of Central Florida, Valencia College, and Westgate Resorts. In-kind sponsors for the event were, Mears Transportation Group, Orlando Sentinel Media Group, OUC-the reliable one, and Tito's Handmade Vodka.

Board members Hannah Besanceney (Community Volunteer) and Kari Conley (Orlando Health) chaired the Gala Steering Committee. WFTV News Channel 9's Vanessa Echols acted as the event emcee and there were 22 Honorary Hosts comprised of business and community leaders in attendance.

For more information about The First Five Years Gala or The Early Learning Coalition of Orange County, please visit [www.elcoc.org](http://www.elcoc.org) or call 407-841-6607.

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#### **About the Early Learning Coalition of Orange County (ELCOC)**

The vision of the Early Learning Coalition of Orange County is to ensure that all children are fully prepared to enter school, ready to learn. Since 2000 and through public/private partnerships, the organization has worked to provide leadership, guidance and support for school readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) programs for children in Orange County. Services include from providing subsidized child care for eligible children and vouchers to families for VPK participation as well as providing scholarships to build the credentials of early education professionals. The ELCOC supports more than 750 early care and education providers, serving more than 26,000 children annually. For additional information about the [Early Learning Coalition of Orange County](http://www.elcoc.org) and its programs, please visit [www.elcoc.org](http://www.elcoc.org) or call (407) 841-6607.