

 Click to Print

[EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

## Charter Expanding Grade Levels



Tribune photo by LOIS KINDLE

Jay Taylor, right, of Taylor & Fulton Tomatoes kicks off the campaign with a check for \$125,000 to Principal Mark Haggett of the Redlands Christian Migrant Association Charter School, also known as RCMA Academy. The check was presented to kick off a new capital campaign to expand the school to include middle school grades.

By LOIS KINDLE

## The Tampa Tribune

Published: May 14, 2008

### Related Links

-  [Photo](#)

WIMAUMA - The Redlands Christian Migrant Association recently launched a capital campaign to raise \$1.6 million to expand its charter school.

Known as RCMA Wimauma Academy, the school, which is on U.S. 301, was founded in 2000 to prepare the children of low-income and migrant families for public schools.

"We started as both an elementary and middle school for children in grades kindergarten through second and sixth through eighth," said Mark Haggett, academy director. "Our goal was to prepare them developmentally on the early end and to keep them in school during the middle school years."

But the cost was formidable for the charter school, so after a few years the middle school grades were phased out. The school gradually added third through fifth grades.

"I promised the parents at that time I'd bring the middle school grades back," said Barbara Mainster, executive director of RCMA. "Now I'm starting to feel like it's going to happen."

"We're ready to add the middle school back," Haggett said. "We want to keep our kids here even longer to make them more prepared for high school, no matter where they choose to go."

Several area nonprofit organizations and a Palmetto business have stepped forward with seed money.

In fall, the **Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center** started things rolling by awarding a \$50,000 matching grant.

"The Wimauma Academy makes such a difference in the lives of children in the area," said Evelyn Lunsford, foundation chairwoman. "Anything we can do to expand the number of children they serve is beneficial."

On Earth Day, when the campaign officially kicked off, Jay Taylor of Taylor & Fulton Tomatoes in Palmetto gave the school \$125,000.

"My brother and I are just getting out of the produce business our father founded, and we are grateful for what RCMA has done for our employees and their children," he said. "We couldn't think of a better way to assure the very best start in life for these kids."

Accepting the check, Mainster thanked Taylor and said the donation would help the academy "keep developing its human resources."

In May, the school received \$10,000 from the Mabel and Ellsworth Simmons Foundation and \$25,000 from the Interfaith Social Action Council of Sun City Center.

"There's an obvious need there and one that's right here in our community," said Naomi Fulton, the council's grants committee chairwoman. "We love the parent-teacher ratio at the academy, and the fact that the matriculation rate is very high."

With these gifts and previous donations and pledges, the school is \$260,000 closer to its goal of increasing capacity to 255 students. The school serves 175 in grades prekindergarten through fifth.

"This is just the start," Mainster said. "We're counting on the generous support of area residents and businesses to complete this project."

Haggett said the expansion will feature environmentally friendly "green" architecture and provide 9,300 square feet of additional space and seven classrooms. It also will include a music and art room, teacher resource room, a cafeteria and a kitchen.

The academy's student enrollment is 99 percent Hispanic, and 30 percent migrant. Eighty-nine percent are English language learners and 99 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

The school has received an A since the 2003-04 school year.

Haggett said he met with Allen Witt, dean of academic affairs for Hillsborough Community College's new South Shore campus May 7 to build a relationship where students can intern at the academy.

"It would do our kids good to have successful local students teaching them," he said.

## REDLANDS CHRISTIAN MIGRANT ASSOCIATION

**WHAT:** Nonprofit, nonsectarian organization that provides child development services for farmworker and rural, low-income families

HEADQUARTERS: Immokalee

DIRECTOR: Barbara Mainster

SERVES: Nearly 8,000 children in 21 counties throughout the state

BUDGET: More than \$55 million

FUNDING: National, state and county organizations, local grants and private donations

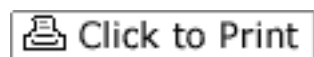
INFORMATION: 1-800-282-6540 or [www.rcma.org](http://www.rcma.org)

Reporter Lois Kindle can be reached at (813) 865-1553 or [lkindle@tampatrib.com](mailto:lkindle@tampatrib.com).

---

**Find this article at:**

<http://southshore2.tbo.com/content/2008/may/14/ss-charter-expanding-grade-levels>



[EMAIL THIS](#) |  
[Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

©2008 Media General Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Member agreement](#) and [privacy statement](#)