



# THE PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

**PRESIDENT AND CEO  
GENE T. JONES**

## Dear Friends,

As our facilities begin to reopen through our phased approach, I would like to take a moment to say welcome back to our members and thank you to those that stayed with us throughout this challenging time. I have always understood the impact of the Y, but over the past several months, I have witnessed firsthand our communities come together in a capacity I could never have imagined. I am humbled and proud to be a part of this cause-driven organization and community. Together, we were able to meet the critical needs of our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and together, we will continue to positively impact the people we serve through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. United, we will continue to provide opportunities for everyone to reach their full potential through programs that create healthy families and communities.

## GRADUATIONS

Graduation and promotion ceremonies are a big part of any child's life, whether you are 5 and graduating Early Learning and getting ready for Kindergarten or if you are in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade getting ready for your transition to High School. Every year the Y looks forward to these celebrations to honor our children's milestone achievement of graduating. This year gave the Y an opportunity to think outside of the box to find a way to make this extra special for our graduates at a time when life for many is very difficult. In the spirit of the Y, we did just that; we turned what could have been a missed opportunity into a home run that will live with children and their families forever.

**Sky Academy Venice's** graduation was our first during the pandemic and they started their celebrations with a bang. All of the teachers stood with everything from pom-poms to signs to honor the graduates as they made their final drive onto the SKY parking lot. At the end was Principal Smith with a mask on handing out diplomas. He congratulated all of the SKY graduates and gave them each yard signs to show their achievement to their community. It was a great experience for the children and one of the best things was seeing the parents and children tailgating as many of them saw their friends for the first time in a few months.

**Venice Early Learning** also had a drive-thru graduation. The teachers had pictures of the graduates in their caps and gowns throughout the parking lot as they drove onto the lot. As the newest kindergarten class made their drive around the loop in decorated cars and smiles from ear to ear, each child was given a gift to celebrate this awesome moment in their lives. Very similar to SKY Venice, parents and children tailgated so the children could spend some time with friends that they have spent years together and have not seen in the past several months.

## MEALS PROGRAM

Our meals program started on March 23rd when the school closure began due to COVID-19, SKY Academy Englewood distributed 12,580 free meals to school aged members in the community. Our partnership with Mango Bistro, a local Englewood restaurant, provided another 2,831 free meals for adults. Two Englewood elementary school employees worked at our food distribution program during the entire closure, providing a great link between the elementary school community and our middle school. All Faiths Food Bank was another great partner who helped provide free meals at SKY Academy Englewood every Friday during the closure. We were also the distribution host site for Lee County Schools at our Bonita Spring and Ft. Myers locations.

## GRADUATIONS CONTINUED...

**SKY Englewood** finished off our graduation events. The staff took advantage of their space to create a drive-in graduation, streamed live on Facebook. Following the speech by Principal Bailey, he then announced every graduating student's name. When they drove up to the front and received their diplomas teachers clapped and cheered.

It was amazing to watch the smiles on our graduates faces. Thank you to our team for creating an experience these families and children will remember for the rest of their lives.

## PHASE 2 REOPENING

As of June 15<sup>th</sup>, the early morning hours are back at all of the branches. Personal training and Kids Zone reopened with limited hours for your family! Contact your Y on how to make



reservations. We are happy to announce that swimming lessons will be returning the week of June 29th. Swimming is an important skill to have and benefits you for a lifetime. Watch for registration announcements on social media.

## THE NEW BONITA SPRINGS EARLY LEARNING CENTER

The SKY Family YMCA is excitingly waiting for our grand opening of our new early learning center at the Bonita Springs YMCA. Our official first day of program will be August 10th, however families will be able to tour the facility and meet the staff in mid-July. Our newest team member Monica Taccone will be our director for the center. She has decades of experience in the early childhood field, has a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education and is currently working on obtaining her PhD. We are thrilled to have her join the SKY Family team to serve families in Lee County and to strengthen the educational foundation for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old.



## WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

The SKY Family YMCA  
Bonita Springs • Englewood • Fort Myers • North Port • Port Charlotte • Venice • Punta Gorda  
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The Mission of the YMCA is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.