

around town II HAPPENINGS

LEGAL EAGLES

Florida's Children First Palm Beach Event Honors Foster Care Advocates

More than 100 child advocates, lawyers, judges and politicians gathered at the Gunster Yoakley law firm offices in West Palm Beach to honor Palm Beach County residents making a difference in the lives of foster children.

Florida's Children First (FCF) Executive Director Christina Spudeas and President Howard Talenfeld, a staunch child advocate and partner of Colodny Fass Talenfeld Karlinsky & Abate, led the event, which raised more than \$20,000 and honored local foster care advocates, as well as a young adult who successfully made it through the system.



"Even in a down economy FCF is fortunate to be supported by individuals who open up their hearts and their purse strings to support programs for our state's foster children," said Spudeas.

This year's honorees included Nora Collins-Mandeville, Mari Frankel and Rita and Les Gorenflo. Foster care "graduate" Obadiah Payton was also recognized for his successful transition into independent living.

Collins-Mandeville was honored for her passion for children who have aged out of foster care, her natural ability to connect with young people and her search to find a better way for Florida's child-serving systems. Frankel was selected for her participation in community, civic and educational programs involving children and families. Her relentless efforts in organizations such as Adopt-A-Family and Project GROW have contributed to many of the agencies' successful events. The Gorenflos were recognized for their love and compassion for all children, especially those at risk or with disabilities. Together, they have adopted a total of seven children, making them true exemplary role models.

This year's youth honoree, Obadiah Payton, was recognized for his successful graduation out of foster care. He was recently awarded a mini-grant to convene a summit addressing mental health issues and is actively involved in statewide initiatives to improve mental health services including those involving youth transitioning to adulthood.

Florida's Children First is the leading statewide child advocacy program, serving as a "watchdog" agency, holding DCF and others accountable, and helping them do a better job at protecting the children who need their services ○