

Contact: Terry Anne Barman, Preschool Director 949-494-2535x107 *For Immediate Release*

PARENTS PRIDE SHINES AT GRADUATION DAY FOR CLUB PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Laguna Beach, CA – On June 17th, 24 local families celebrated as their children finished their school year at the Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach – Even Start Club Preschool. This exceptional program is a free preschool for 3 and 4-year old children from qualifying low income families living in Laguna Beach and surrounding communities. For many of these families, this is the first graduation ceremony they have ever attended. Also in the audience were Boys & Girls Club Board members Dorene Butler and Phyllis Phillips, as well as School Board member Jan Vickers. The children entertained the guests with three skits, acting out their favorite books, followed by the group singing four of their favorite songs. Afterwards the children were formally presented with their very first diploma. The Laguna Beach School Readiness Coordinator, Julie Olsen, gave each child a book and a backpack of goodies for their summer studies. The proud parents and children then gathered for a celebratory potluck luncheon.

Pamela Estes, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach remarked, “These children are our future's most precious resource. The pride of both students and parents beam around the room. For many families, this is their first graduation ceremony of any kind. We are honored to help set the pace and perspective that these young ones will carry with them throughout their academic career. They are starting off with an eagerness to learn, enjoyment of reading, and associating school with success. These are qualities that will carry them through high school and – our goal for them – into higher education. This kind of life changing program doesn't happen in a bubble, it definitely takes a village. The collaboration and support of so many local organizations and individuals create the synergy for this kind of transformation. Although it costs our Club around \$5,500 per child to operate this high quality program, our community understands that everyone benefits from the investment we make together in these young lives. The “ROI” for everyone is a legacy of caring for others, opening doors to new paths of school success, and opportunities for them to contribute back to society in their future.”

The goal of the Even Start Club Preschool program, which replaced Head Start in Laguna Beach when they closed the classroom at El Morro in 1999, is to give underserved children an “even start” when they

enter the public school system. Predominantly from Spanish speaking households, by the time that these precious little ones “graduate” from the program, they know the alphabet, they can count, they have developed a love of books, and they have learned the social skills needed to thrive in a classroom setting. According to Terry Anne Barman, Preschool Director, “I am so amazed at how much the children have learned and how ready they are for kindergarten. They recognize high frequency words and the alphabet and know the sounds of each letter. They will enter the kindergarten very prepared and in many cases ahead of the other students. Because of our preschool, everyone truly has an “even start” to their future education.”

Eight of the graduates will be attending El Morro in the fall, and one will be going to Top of the World Elementary School.

The Even Start Club Preschool has been identified by Orange County United Way as a Star Quality preschool and has been recognized for its outstanding impact on students by parents, teachers and school administrators in Laguna Beach. For more information, please call Terry Anne Barman at 949-494-2535x107.

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