Dear Friends,

Lena Pope is focused on helping children grow into strong, resilient and contributing members of the community. To do that, the agency is experiencing some growth, too.

This year, Lena Pope was granted permission by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to expand Chapel Hill Academy (CHA), our open-enrollment, tuition-free public charter school for children in Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade. Construction has begun to add capacity for 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Approval was also granted to increase total enrollment and expand the geographic boundaries of the school. These changes will enable CHA to serve more children, and for more of their academic careers.

And, Lena Pope was recently awarded a competitive grant by TEA to help enhance access to high-quality early education. The grant will lay a foundation for Lena Pope to better reach children from low-income households who can benefit most from an academic foundation that ensures a strong future.

In this issue of Legacy, you will read about efforts by Lena Pope to help encourage adoption of a common assessment tool among local early childcare providers for children zero to four years old. It’s all part of our goal to improve outcomes for children in Fort Worth and beyond.

Of course, none of this would be possible without you — our donors, advocates and allies. Thanks for all you do to help grow great kids in our community.

With appreciation,

Todd A. Landry
Lena Pope Congratulates Hometown Hero

Lena Pope congratulates Victoria Sendejo, Principal of Chapel Hill Academy (CHA), for receiving the 2017 Hometown Heroes award from Modern Woodmen of America. The financial institution bestows this honor each year on someone who has done exceptional work in the community. Principal Sendejo was nominated for her commitment to excellence at CHA and the outstanding use of her position to make a significant impact on the community.

According to Modern Woodmen of America, the award recognizes the work of its local members who are dedicated to serving others. Recipients of the Hometown Hero award are nominated by a member of the Modern Woodmen of America branch where the individual banks.

“The Hometown Hero Award from Modern Woodmen of America inspires me to continue my work with students and families, as well as seek out new ways of serving our community,” said Sendejo.

In honor of the award, the financial institution makes a charitable contribution to the recipient’s charity of choice. Principal Sendejo chose Lena Pope as her charitable recipient because she believes in the agency’s mission.

“I often tell my students that if they act responsibly, conduct themselves with self-respect and respect toward others and their environment, that their efforts do not go unnoticed,” said Sendejo.

“We all want to be caught being good and doing good.”

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On the Cover: Early Learning Center students Olivia and Khrystain measure one another as part of an ongoing, cooperative learning environment.
From Rock Music to Wedding Bells: A Couple’s Journey

The Marty Leonard Community Chapel hosts more than 200 weddings each year. Usually the site where relationships reach a culminating milestone, the Chapel is not typically where a relationship begins. But that was the case for Stephen Rios and Shannon Bull, who met at the Chapel when they both attended a committee meeting there for one of Lena Pope’s annual fundraisers, Rock the Fort.

Unbeknownst to them, the two had actually crossed paths for a number of years without ever officially meeting. They both attended Texas A&M University at the same time. There, Stephen and Shannon attended several of the same events, without directly encountering their future soul mate. After graduation, they both wanted to use their spare time to help others. This desire led each of them separately to become involved in the Lena Pope Young Professional Advocates (YPAs).

As part of the Lena Pope YPAs, they attended events and fundraisers that constantly placed them in the same place as one another, but still they never met. “I had noticed him several times but never introduced myself,” Shannon said.

It wasn’t until they both joined the Rock the Fort event committee in 2013 that Stephen and Shannon would finally be introduced. For several months, they only saw each other at the committee meetings. Finally, while walking together carrying supplies from the Marty Leonard Chapel after one of those meetings, fate stepped in so they could finally officially become acquainted.

“I knew instantly that he was the man I was going to marry,” Shannon said. Shannon knew from their long conversations and commonalities that he was the one. For Stephen, it took a bit more time. After a long day setting-up and volunteering at Rock the Fort, Stephen saw Shannon in a different light.

“She was walking down the driveway (at Heart of the Ranch) and there was just something about the way the sun hit her hair, and I knew,” Stephen said. Stephen knew he needed to make his move. As he tells it, he “bought” her a drink. (Drinks were included in the Rock the Fort ticket). From there, the conversation started flowing and they knew this was something special.

After dating for three years, Stephen knew it was time to make it official. They had plans to meet his parents at Press Café. First, they took a detour to the very spot where Stephen had fallen in love with Shannon. As he got down on one knee, Shannon was so excited that she shouted “Yes!” before Stephen could even get the words out.

The couple is excited to attend Rock the Fort this year on September 29 to celebrate where their relationship began. Stephen and Shannon are also busy planning a wedding for July 2018. And to little surprise, they have chosen the Marty Leonard Community Chapel as the venue where they’ll exchange their vows.

“It only made sense to get married at the Chapel because Lena Pope has been a huge part of our relationship,” Shannon said.

Lena Pope congratulates Stephen and Shannon on their engagement.

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Lena Pope is pleased to announce an expansion of Chapel Hill Academy to include 6th, 7th and 8th grades. The decision to expand was driven by research revealing a need to provide high-quality educational experiences for students beyond 5th grade.

While early education is vital to long-term academic success, the middle school years remain highly meaningful. It’s a time of major change for adolescents. Research shows that, on average, children’s grades drop dramatically during the first year of middle school compared to their grades in elementary school. And, a 12 percent drop in trust occurs between elementary and middle school. Students also become less interested in school, less self-assured about their abilities, and more stressed about academics and social interactions during this time in their lives.

The need for expansion was also demonstrated through the Lena Pope’s ongoing multi-year longitudinal study that tracks CHA’s graduated 5th grade students through high school graduation. It measures how well CHA has prepared students for middle school, high school and postsecondary success. The study reveals that students leaving CHA after 5th grade outperform traditional/ISD peers in all subjects and on the state standardized tests. Yet they show significant regression in STAAR Math and Reading upon completion of ISD 6th and 7th grade. This academic data suggests CHA’s students will benefit from having continued access to the high-quality educational and social-emotional experiences offered at Lena Pope’s charter school.

And, the expansion will fill a gap. While the surrounding area offers 33 choice or specialty school options for high school, there are only 20 choice or specialty school options for middle school. CHA will now provide another option with strong academics and specialized learning services accompanied by a continued focus on family engagement.

In Tarrant County, where 51 percent of students are identified at risk of dropping out of school, let alone graduating prepared for college or workforce entry, such programs are critical.

The expansion plan includes building approximately 25,000 sq. ft. of space at the current campus. Classrooms, offices and cafeteria space will be designed in alignment with the original charter commitment to best practices in learning. Rollout of the additional grades begins with 6th grade in Fall 2018. The 7th and 8th grades will be added in Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 respectively.

In addition to the middle school grades, Lena Pope was also granted permission by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to increase enrollment to accommodate more of the nearly 400 children on the current waitlist, and to expand the geographic boundary of the school. The expansion of CHA will allow Lena Pope to continue serving the ethnically diverse, predominantly lower-income students who are currently educated in the elementary grades.

Construction of the additional campus infrastructure is already underway, and giving opportunities are available to support the expansion. For more information, please contact Lynda Gearheart, Lena Pope’s Director of Development, at 817-255-2606.
No single factor determines if a child is ready to start kindergarten. Instead, a child’s development on many fronts can indicate how prepared they are for success in the classroom.

More and more focus is placed on 3rd grade reading competency, a strong indicator of a child’s long-term academic success. Along with that, greater attention is also being placed on Kindergarten readiness to help ensure children reach school prepared to achieve literacy.

To help determine whether students are entering school with the competencies needed to thrive, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) collaborated with The University of Texas Health Science Center’s Children’s Learning Institute to develop a new tool: the Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment System (TX-KEA). Beginning this fall, it will be used to assess children upon entry into Kindergarten.

Even with this tool, a gap exists for assessing children in the birth to four-year-old age range. This is a critical time in a child’s life, when action can be taken at an earlier stage to recognize challenges and address deficiencies. In Tarrant County, no standardized assessment tool is being utilized across the many agencies providing early education experiences for children in this age range. Without a common tool, providers lack the information and data needed to improve the quality of education delivery. And, none of the tools currently used in Tarrant County include a component to assess children academically. It leaves a critical gap of knowledge.

Lena Pope recognized a need to research an assessment tool to better evaluate children in the Early Learning Center. Lena Pope applied for and received a Toolbox grant from the North Texas Community Foundation to address this issue. The grant allowed Lena Pope’s staff to conduct an evaluation of assessment tools for children zero to four years-old. This evaluation included identification of the ideal components to be included in an assessment tool. And, it compared a variety of assessment tools to determine which would best fill the needs of assessing local children for school readiness.

Through this research, Lena Pope identified two assessment tools, Teaching Strategies GOLD and COR Advantage by HighScope, that meet the desired criteria for evaluating young children. These include:

- Addressing the 0-4 age range
- Academic Components
- Social/Emotional Competency Component
- Technology/Software Component Required
- Flexible Administration (Frequency, Timeframe, etc.)

Upon completion of the research, Lena Pope saw an additional opportunity to improve system-wide delivery of services to young children in Tarrant County through the collaboration with the Early Learning Alliance. If one assessment tool could be adopted collectively in the region, academic readiness and Kindergarten preparedness can be identified and managed earlier for children under the age of four. Lena Pope has been able to share the information gained from the evaluation process with numerous education providers across the region. And, advocate for the adoption of a common assessment tool within Tarrant County.

Lena Pope is committed to improving early education systems community-wide. By working together with other early learning providers, Lena Pope hopes to achieve community-wide impact through improved quality of, and access to, high-class learning opportunities for even the youngest children in greater Fort Worth.
A bright-eyed and excited 7-year-old boy approached the front counter at Lena Pope asking where he could make a donation. With his mother’s help, several birthday bags and plastic bins were brought in from the car, many overflowing with school supplies, toiletries, toys and blankets.

“Can I meet one of the kids who get these supplies?” Christian’s voice was full of eagerness.

While other young boys spend time making birthday wish lists for the newest game system, Hot Wheels® cars or a bicycle, Christian takes a different approach. Leading up to his annual celebration, the Fort Worth resident researches and selects a charity to receive his birthday gifts.

According to Jacquelyn, Christian’s mother; his parents were so thankful for him when he was born that they decided to start a tradition of giving back. Each year the family would research and select a charity that aligned with their values. Then they would plan a “Donation Birthday Party” where donations would be accepted in lieu of gifts.

Once Christian was old enough to make decisions, his parents gave him the choice: he could begin to receive gifts at his birthday party or continue to accept donations. “With enthusiasm in his voice, he chose to donate,” Jacquelyn said. “It has become a precious tradition that Christian looks forward to every year.”

Over the years, he has donated to many different charitable organizations and has selected Lena Pope two times. His passion to help children significantly influences his choice of charity. As part of their yearly tradition, the family sits together and reads the mission statements of each organization. “Lena Pope’s strong presence in Fort Worth and long history of helping Tarrant County children and families made it an easy choice,” Jacquelyn said.

Through its “Project Care” initiative, Lena Pope maintains a closet of supplies for distribution to children and families in times of need. Items in the closet range from school supplies, bedding and clothing to non-perishable food items and cleaning or bath supplies. With this in mind, Christian collected a mixture of school and shower supplies, craft kits, toys, shoes and hats for his 7th birthday.

Second Annual Blessing of the Animals

Bring furry, finned or feathered friends to the courtyard of the Marty Leonard Community Chapel for a special Blessing of the Animals ceremony hosted by Lena Pope. The celebration includes a brief service with a collective blessing of the creatures, a resource booth with information on the developmental and psychological benefits of pets for children and other fun activities. Attendees receive a certificate to commemorate the blessing.

All animals are welcome with a human companion. Bring photos for a special remembrance blessing of former pets.

For more details and guidelines, visit www.lenapope.org.

“Not to hurt our humble brethren is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission — to be of service to them whenever they require it.”

St. Francis of Assisi

Date: Sunday, October 1, 2017
Time: 2:30 pm
Location: Marty Leonard Community Chapel
3131 Sanguinet Street, Fort Worth, TX 76107