

## **NAPLES ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN ANNOUNCES APPLE BLOSSOM AWARD WINNERS**

Naples Alliance for Children honored twenty Collier County preschool Apple Blossom Award teachers during their Celebration Dinner, April 6 at the Country Club of Naples. The NAFC Apple Blossom award celebrates outstanding early childhood practice in the education of children, infancy through five year olds, who attend non-public schools. The NAFC *Apple Blossom Awards* honor Collier County early childhood teachers who make a unique contribution to the lives of young children and their families.

“The Apple Blossom Award is one way to recognize the hard work and dedication put forth by these teachers,” said Beth Jones. “They shoulder a huge responsibility in being a partner with the home in raising and educating children during these critical years. The large number of nominees this year reflects the high level of confidence those parents have in that partnership.”

The Apple Blossom Award program was started in 1997 and each year winners and finalists are selected from the list of nominees. The nominees are evaluated on information submitted by the nominators and “on site visits.” Each teacher is visited by members of a selection committee of early childhood specialists who observe and rate their teaching, room environment and interaction with children.

“The task becomes more difficult,” say Helene Gradolph and Sandy Raizes, Co-chairs of the Selection Committee, “as the number of nominees increases each year. There are so many excellent teachers. What is encouraging is that a number of nominees who don’t receive an award their first year are selected in subsequent years.” The selection committee offers individual feedback and consultations to all nominees.

The 2011 Apple Blossom Awards went to:

**2011 TEACHERS OF THE YEAR are Avril Carr-Lloyd; Ramona Altagracia Grullon; Noemy Gonzalez**

**2011 APPLE BLOSSOM FINALISTS are Maria Parra; Kimberly Ratcliff; Melissa Alvarez; Michelle Blackmon**

**The 2011 Apple Blossom winners and finalists were selected from the following group of nominees**

**MELISSA ALVAREZ**, The Creation Station Wee Christian Learning Center; **SABITA BHATT**, YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor Center; **MICHELLE BLACKMON**, YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor Center; **AVRIL CARR-LLOYD**, YMCA of the Palms/Infant-toddler Center; **VERONICA CARRATINI**, YMCA of the Palms/Infant-Toddler Center; **BRITTANY CASSIN**, YMCA of the Palms/Infant-toddler Center; **TRACY DEARING**, NCH Bear’s Den Child Care Center; **NOEMY GONZALEZ**, Guadalupe Center of

Immokalee; **RAMONA ALTAGRACIA GRULLON**, RCMA Farm Workers Village C  
CDC; **LAURALEE HAHNL**, YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor Center; **MARJETA  
HALITAJ**, The Creation Station Wee Christian Learning Center; **VONCEAL  
JACKSON**, Immokalee Child Care Center; **DEBORAH LORMEUS**, The Creation  
Station Wee Christian Learning Center; **DIONETTE MOLINA**, Guadalupe Center of  
Immokalee; **MARIA PARRA**, Immokalee Child Care Center; **KIMBERLY  
RATCLIFF**, YMCA Veterans Memorial Early Learning Center; **BARBARA REYES**,  
YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor Center; **DORIS SANDS**, YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor  
Center; **MONICA TACCONE**, YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor Center; **IVAN TORRES**,  
YMCA of the Palms/Gaynor Center