



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Achievement Academy Celebrating 60 Years**

LAKELAND, FL (October 5, 2015) Achievement Academy is celebrating 60 Years of serving children with special needs in our community. On Tuesday, October 27<sup>th</sup> from 3:00pm to 5:00pm, there will be an Anniversary Celebration and Open House. **All are invited to attend.** This celebration will take place at the Achievement Academy, 716 E. Bella Vista Street, Lakeland, FL 33805.

It all began in 1955 with a group of parents who had a dream -- a place in Polk County that provided education, therapies and services for their children with cerebral palsy. Remember, it wasn't until 1974 that federal law mandated a free, appropriate public education to all children, regardless of disability. The school opened in Lakeland in 1956 as **United Cerebral Palsy** serving both children and young adults. Many hours of volunteer work were required to keep the Center operating with the Junior Welfare League providing a full-time volunteer. The main building at the Lakeland campus was completed in 1967, and a poolside addition completed in 1975. As more children with other developmental delays and disabilities were welcomed, the organization disaffiliated with United Cerebral Palsy and became **Child Development Center of Polk County, Inc.** (CDC) in 1987. As the need for services and space continued to grow, the pool was filled in and the two buildings joined in 1989. In 1997, the Child Development Center's application to become a Charter School was approved and in 2004 the name was changed to **Achievement Academy**. The Lakeland Campus expanded again in 2013, adding 5 new classrooms, and 3 new therapy rooms.

Meanwhile, a satellite classroom was opened in Winter Haven in the early 1980s using donated space. A permanent home was finally established in 1999 when a building was purchased, thanks to a generous donation from Bill and Gloria McIntee. Classes began at the McIntee Center later that same year. In 1984, a satellite classroom was opened in Bartow, also using donated space in area churches.

Again, thanks to a generous donation by Mrs. W. F. Peacock, who donated her late husband's medical building, classes began in Bartow's newly renovated Peacock Center in 1993.

Today Achievement Academy Charter School serves 157 students at its three campuses in Lakeland, Bartow and Winter Haven. In addition to the Charter School, Achievement Academy has served thousands of children and families in their homes since 1997 through our early intervention program. Thanks to United Way, the program continues today, serving hundreds of children and families each year, as the Birth To Three Program.

Aside from the bricks and mortar, what we are most proud of at Achievement Academy are the teachers, therapists, early interventionists and staff who have passionately served our students and families these past 60 years. Many current staff have dedicated over 10 years ~ but all willingly and joyfully carry the dream that the original group of parents had some 60 years ago. It is with gratitude and appreciation that we recognize retired Executive Director, Paula Sullivan, and former teacher, now Principal, Cindi Parker-Pearson, who have been instrumental in communicating the vision and implementing the dream over the last 30 years. For them, it has always been "all about the children," and that message continues to be shared.

For more information, please contact Stacy Williams, Development Director at 863-683-6504 x. 136 or visit our website at [www.achievementacademy.com](http://www.achievementacademy.com).

*The Achievement Academy serves children from birth through age five with various developmental delays and disabilities. The Achievement Academy offers two programs, each provided at no cost to the child or family. The first program is a **Charter School** that offers specialized instruction by certified teachers; small class sizes; individual speech, occupational and physical therapies; and assistive technologies that enable each student to reach his or her full potential at one of the Achievement Academy's three campus locations (Lakeland, Winter Haven and Bartow). The second is a "**Birth to Three Program**" that provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers who are "at-risk" for developmental delays and/or have been identified with a specific delay. Professional Early Interventionists serve these children and their families. More than half of the Birth to Three Program's budget is funded by a generous allocation from the United Way of Central Florida.*