



West Boca Forum

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NEWS

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Highland Beach couple name center at Place of Hope

Visitors to the Place of Hope in West Boca won't recognize the old recreation hall, the latest transformation on the former The Haven campus now dotted with cottage-style accommodations for children eligible for foster care or who have aged out of the system.

The building still stands. But what was one big empty room is now The Jeannine and Leland Morris Art, Education and Wellness Center. There's a sleek commercial teaching kitchen, a 500-square-foot gym, a coffee bar, study areas and places to gather inside and out. There's even a patio.

"It's stylish, but functional," Jeannine Morris said, crediting advance-

ment director Lisa McDulin with the concept.

The Highland Beach couple had precedent naming a building on a campus already named for Leighan and David Rinker. It was the next step in their commitment. She's an Angel Mom, a group formed to bring awareness, sponsor events and encourage donations.

"A friend invited me to a luncheon and their mission intrigued me," she said about the Place of Hope's Paxson campus in Palm Beach Gardens. "I was impressed by the team and like the faith-based concept."

She was impressed with founding executive director Charles Bender's "vision and enthusiasm."

"There are approximately 1,210 in out-of-home care in Palm Beach County. During 2015, there was an average of 97 removals per month," Bender said in a statement at the ribbon cutting.

"My grandfather was a philanthropist, and the most important thing in his life he instilled in me, a passion for giving back to the community," said Leland Morris, who's called Lee. "We have our own family foundation and give to 30 or 40 charities. The things that resonate the most with me and Jeannine are children in need, education and disease [like diabetes]. So when Jeannine approached it, I said, 'OK. Kids. That works.'"

"In the beginning we got

involved in a very small way," he said. "The catalyst for a greater involvement was when they bought this facility," he said about the former The Haven. "We said, 'maybe we could make a difference here.'"

The Morrisises, who have three grown children, liked the idea of cultural enrichment, too. "These kids have nothing and are starting out with three strikes against them. It breaks your heart," he said. "The timing was right and we felt good about it. It's not about us."

The Morrisises are also becoming respite foster parents and completed a six-week training program and home visits.

"We're just finalizing the process for children



THE NAME GAME Leland and Jeannine Morris, left, with founding executive director Charles Bender for the dedication of the Art, Education and Wellness Center in the Morrisises name on the Place of Hope's West Boca campus. SUBMITTED PHOTO

under 2," Jeannine Morris said.

The Place of Hope just announced its third annual Angel Moms Garden Party Brunch and

Benefit at 11 a.m. April 21 at the Boynton Woman's Club. Tickets are \$125 through Allison Killip at allisonk@placeofhope.com or by calling 561-483-0962.