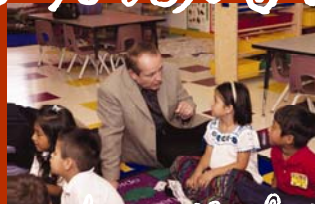
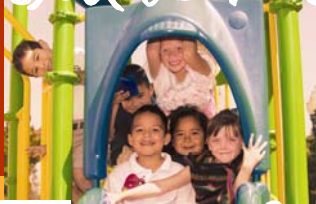


# Children First Newsletter



CHILDREN FIRST™  
A MERAGE FOUNDATION

Expanding Lifetime Opportunities

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

MARCH 2007

## A Letter from Paul Merage, Founder and President

**Paul Merage**  
Founder and  
President

**Marshall Kaplan**  
Executive  
Director

**Sue Cronmiller**  
Program  
Officer

**P: 949.474.5880**

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Dear Friends:

My wife, Lilly and I are proud with the early success of Children First in linking skilled retirees to early childhood development centers serving low income children.

We are amazed at the positive welcome received by retirees from the teachers and staff of Orange County's centers and the ability of

retirees to help children increase their reading and thinking abilities.

To date, Children First has placed almost twenty retirees—pediatricians, teachers, dance therapists, managers and more—at centers throughout Orange County. We look forward to adding significant numbers of retirees and early childhood development centers to the program.

We want Children First to prove that retirees can make a difference in the life time choices of children and that OC can have the finest early childhood development initiatives in the nation.

To get involved in our program, contact Marshall Kaplan and Sue Cronmiller, want to work with you!

Sincerely,  
Paul Merage

## Invest in Children Fund

The Invest in Children Fund at the Orange County Community Foundation was established in 2005 - with the initial financial support of Paul and Lilly Merage - to support innovative early childhood development centers that serve low-income children. Many of these children enter kindergarten developmentally behind

other children and many never catch up!

The Invest in Children Fund is a



**Ruth Moos, Merage Fellow and Retired Realtor, at The Cambodian Family.**

community owned fund that was established in hopes that other business people and community leaders will contribute to the early education of children. The Fund awards grants to centers to increase cognitive, language, communication and motor skills of at-risk children in an effort to

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*"It has been wonderful to have extra hands and hearts assisting in the preschool. Our volunteers, Cal Kurtz, Cynthia and Mark Spero bring valuable wisdom and experience to our program. They make it possible for us to achieve our mission of restoring at-risk neighborhoods one life at a time by acting as a positive influence for the young children in our community."*

**Ava Steffans**

**President/CEO**

**KidWorks**

Cal, Cynthia and Mark all volunteer 8 hours a week at KidWorks Preschool.



CHILDREN FIRST™  
A MERAGE FOUNDATION

# My Experience

By Cynthia Spero, Merage Fellow and Mentor

In the fall of 2006, I began volunteering with Children First, a Merage Foundation. As a mentor, my role is to support the work of the teachers at KidWorks Preschool in Santa Ana. I bring over twenty-five years of experience in the fields of teaching, tutoring, care giving, and recreation to my volunteer position. I am fortunate to be able to use my skills to positively impact the children, their families, and community.

Today, as I drive to my volunteer assignment, I am inspired by the song, "World", on my car radio.

*"...What kind of world do you want?*

*Think anything*

*Let's start at the start*

*Build a masterpiece*

*Be careful what you wish*

*for*

*History starts now..."*

Soon, I reach an under-resourced area of Santa Ana where families of preschool students

pay a minimal fee and help at the school. When I push open the door to the new well-equipped school, I see four-year-olds and five-year-olds

building tall towers of colorful blocks. "Mira, Maestra / Look, Teacher," the preschoolers call to me. I admire their handiwork and exclaim, "Wow, I am proud of you!" They know that I mean what I say and their confidence builds.

The bell rings to signal clean up time. The children quickly knock down the blocks and put them on the shelf. They have learned to trust the reassuring words of caring teachers on staff and Children First Mentors like me, "Next time, you can start fresh and build something different." Next time always comes and the



**Merage Fellows, Cynthia Spero (Retired Teacher) and Cal Kurtz (Retired Jeweler) working reading and interacting with preschoolers at KidWorks.**

boys and girls will build a new world.

As I drive away, I think, "Tomorrow's Calling," another line from that song. I wonder what these boys and girls will achieve in the future. I hope that this opportunity for early learning from many positive role models will empower today's block-builders to continue to work hard to build the kind of world they want.

*Cynthia Spero and her husband, Mark, are both educators who are proud to be part of the inaugural group of Merage Fellows. Their teen daughter, Ariana, also enjoys volunteering.*

**Photographs in this newsletter are provided by Mark Smidht, Merage Fellow and Retired Entrepreneur.**

# ...Invest in Children Fund continued

expand their educational opportunities.

With the generosity of Orange County community leaders, the Invest in Children Fund was able to give over \$100,000 in grants to the following organizations and programs in 2007:

**The Cambodian Family:** Family Play Days program will enrich parent involvement in education.

**El Sol Preschool:** Provides education, health and dental programs to preschoolers.

**Healthy Smiles:** Provides preventative dental care to El Sol preschoolers

**Project Access:** Raising a Reader program will establish an age, culture and language appropriate library in affordable housing complexes.

**Planned Parenthood/WIC:** Go Bananas for Books

program excites parents and children in reading books.

**Rancho Santiago Community College:** Kinder Connect bridges the gap from preschool to kindergarten for parents.

*Monitoring and evaluation of programs is conducted by the Children First—A Merage Foundation.*

## Movement Activities for Preschoolers

Denise Hunt, Retired Preschool Dance Teacher of 25 years, provided 2 hour training titled “Movement Activities for Preschoolers” at Hebrew Academy in Huntington Beach this quarter. Over 20 preschool teachers and directors throughout Orange County attended the training to learn about the importance of structured movement activities and how it can have a positive long-term effect on IQ and academic achievement.

The training showed how teachers could help young children to develop strength, coordination, and fitness, as well as boost the

motor skills needed for success in school and optimum cognitive development, using their natural love of music and movement. Teachers learned a simple, 15-minute program with seven basic motor skills that activate a preschooler’s physical and cognitive development.

Ms. Hunt will provide assistance to participating schools to implement structured movement activities into their curriculum. She is an example of how high skilled baby boomers can make a difference in the lives of children and non-profits. She is a Merage Fellow and

participates in the intergenerational programs by providing training for teachers and directors at early childhood development centers.

*This training was put on by the Children First – A Merage Foundation and Orange County United Way Success by Six Star-Quality Rating System.*

**NEXT TRAINING**

“Movement Activities for Preschoolers”  
by Denise Hunt

April 14, 2007  
9-11 a.m.  
Orange Crescent Montessori  
9802 13th Street  
Garden Grove

“Structured movement activities can have a positive impact and long-term effect on IQ and academic achievement.”



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Connecting low-income children with skilled  
retirees to expand lifetime opportunities

## Children First—A Merage Foundation

was established in 2005 to encourage and facilitate the use of the tremendous skills of retirees and adults *55 and better* to improve early childhood development opportunities for low-income children in Orange County.

**CALL TO ACTION:** If you would like to help at-risk children expand their lifetime opportunities, please contact us today!

## AN INVITATION TO RETIREES AND ADULTS 55 AND BETTER

[www.meragefoundations.com](http://www.meragefoundations.com)

# Merage Fellows: Expanding Lifetime Opportunities

Being a Merage Fellow is more than being a volunteer. Merage Fellows receive many rewards, benefits and extras while they serve at an early childhood development center.

Children First is aiming to create new pathways for older adults to be civically engaged in their communities. As Merage Fellows help their community become a better place to live, Children First wants to bring you many benefits

to keep you connected! Your skills, wisdom and passion to give back will be rewarded and recognized.

### REWARDS

- Find fulfillment in helping young children grow
- Longer lifespans means longer retirements, expand your lifetime opportunities

### BENEFITS

- Stipends available
- Social and recreational activities

- Form new social connections

### EXTRAS

- Training and team building activities
- Educational activities
- Mileage reimbursement

Children First is finding new pathways for retirees and adults *55 and better* to enrich the lives of at-risk children, families and the organizations who serve them.

**WE NEED YOU!**