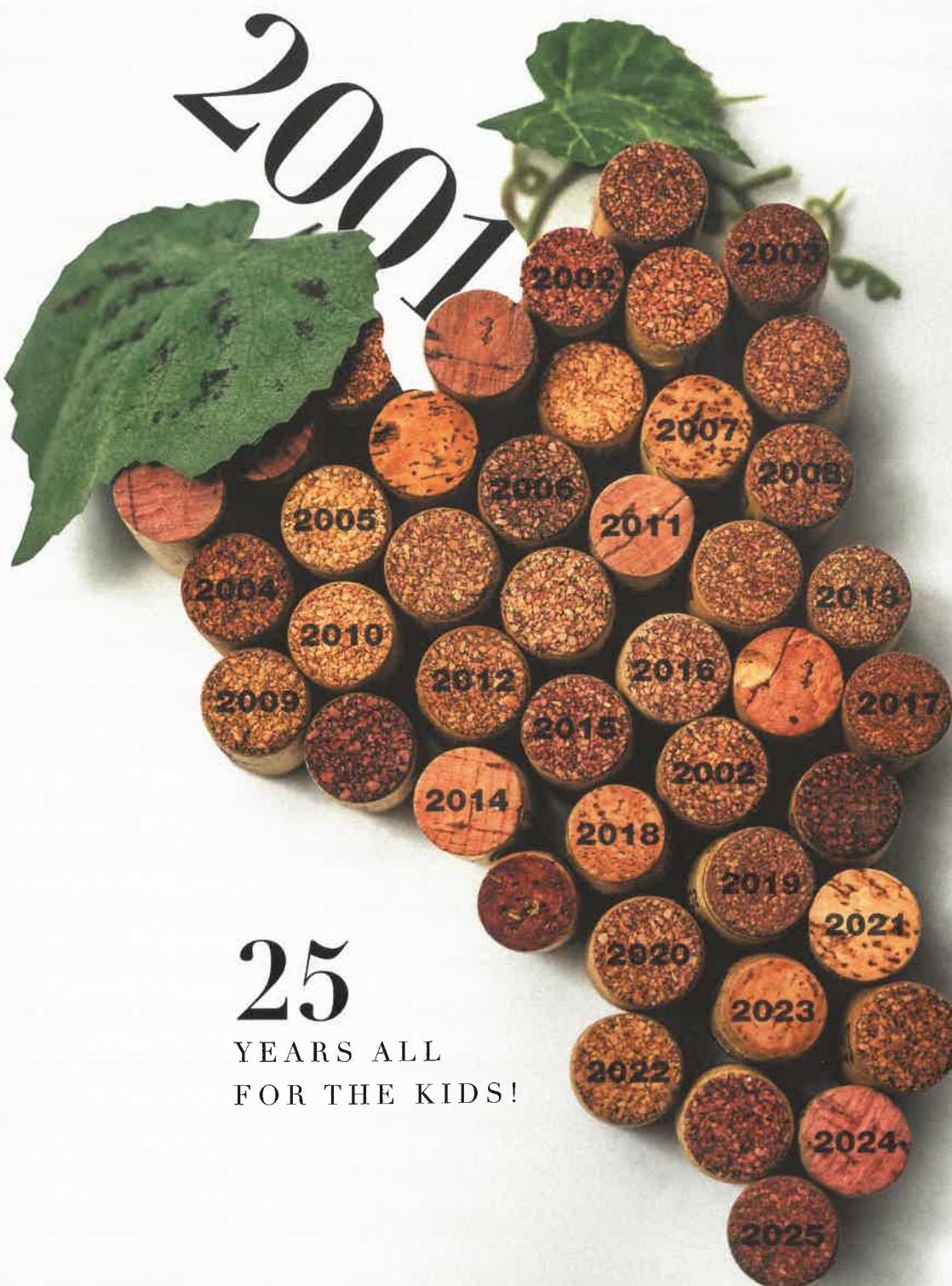


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SALUT!

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NAPLES WINTER WINE FESTIVAL





MILTON SOLIS

Milton Solis, a 6-year-old at Pathways Early Education Center of Immokalee, envisions a future filled with flight. He draws fantastic creatures and superheroes floating on the page among striking bolts of lightning and puffy white clouds. He can't decide if he'd prefer to be an artist or a pilot. "Why not an artist and a pilot?" I ask. "They both soar." His eyes gleam. "Yes, an artist and pilot!"

Milton divides the page into earth and sky. The horizon calls forth more lines, then curves, diagonals, shades, shapes and figures. A flower or a bit of grass emerges, then feet dangling in the air—a child mid-flight, on the page and off. By drawing an object, we often understand it in a new way. When we draw ourselves, the same insights resound.

When Milton first entered Pathways' voluntary pre-kindergarten class (VPK)—a free program provided by the state of Florida—in 2023, he faced significant challenges. The young boy was raised in a Spanish-speaking household and struggled with basic letter and number recognition. Pathways designed a structured literacy program tailored to his needs and provided individualized attention



Part of Pathways Early Education Center of Immokalee's voluntary pre-kindergarten class (a free program provided by the state), 6-year-old Milton Solis envisions a big, bright future: He wants to be a pilot and an artist. "They both soar," he says.



for him in class. Milton's confidence and skills blossomed. Today, he is proficient in English and Spanish, crucial for his academic success in public school.

Pathways works with NCEF to maximize funding and develop innovative programs like Milton's personalized literacy strategy. "We're also a conduit to services provided by other NCEF-funded organizations," marketing coordinator Ashlea Hanson says. NCEF partner organizations like NCH Safe & Healthy Children's Coalition provide drowning prevention and water safety lessons to Pathways' VPK students each summer, and Harry Chapin Food Bank, Meals of Hope and Midwest Food Bank offer food distributions to Pathways' families and the broader Immokalee community.

Pathways, which began its operations in an Immokalee washhouse 60 years ago, now welcomes 125 children, ages 4 weeks to 6 years. Milton spreads out his drawings like a map. "Does he often translate for you?" I ask his mother, Marlin. "He does. And he tells me to learn English, too," she says. Her eyes crinkle at their edges, and her smile widens. Some things require no translation. ■

Pathways collaborates with NCEF to offer innovative programs for its students. The nonprofit created an individualized program to improve Milton's English literacy, paving the way for his academic success.