New Horizons of SWFL Celebrates 25 Years of Transforming Young Lives

From a small neighborhood ministry to thousands of students served, New Horizons marks 25 years of tutoring, mentoring, faith and hope in Southwest Florida.



A New Horizons volunteer works one-on-one with a student, providing academic support and encouragement.

BONITA SPRINGS, FL, UNITED STATES, September 10, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- New Horizons of Southwest Florida is celebrating its 25th anniversary, marking a quarter century of walking alongside children and teens through tutoring, mentoring, faith and character-building programs. At the heart of the organization since its beginning is a simple belief: every child is loved by God and has tremendous value, potential and purpose.

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>
> *Maria, New Horizons Class of 2025*

What began with founders Ellen and Bob Nichols and a desire to reach children in a Bonita Springs neighborhood has grown into a Southwest Florida nonprofit organization that has served thousands of students and families.

Today, New Horizons provides free after-school and summer programming for K-12 students in neighborhoods throughout Lee and Collier counties, bringing together students, staff, volunteers, churches, donors and community partners around a shared belief that a child's circumstances should never determine his or her future.

"Twenty-five years gives us an opportunity to celebrate, but when I think about New Horizons, I don't first think about numbers. I see faces," said Dr. Linda Cunning, CEO of New Horizons of SWFL. "I think about the incredible students we have the privilege of serving. They are bright, funny, resilient, creative and full of dreams. Sometimes they simply need someone to sit beside them, believe in them and remind them that their future can be bigger than the challenges they

face today."

A VISION THAT STARTED WITH BOB AND ELLEN NICHOLS

The New Horizons story began when Ellen Nichols, an educator, and her husband Bob, a professional boat captain, felt called to serve children in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in Bonita Springs.

They went door to door inviting children to a Sunday morning "Super Kids Church." As they built relationships with local families, they saw a growing need for academic support, particularly among students from non-English-speaking homes. Soon, tutoring became part of their mission, and the first Super Kids Club began with approximately 20 children.

That small beginning would ultimately grow into New Horizons of Southwest Florida.

"Bob and Ellen didn't begin with a large building, a strategic expansion plan or a guarantee of what New Horizons would become," Cunning said. "They began by seeing students who needed someone to care, and they answered that need with faith and action. Twenty-five years later, we are still carrying that same calling into every neighborhood club and every relationship with a student."

New Horizons of Southwest Florida celebrates 25 years of transforming young lives.



New Horizons Class of 2025 graduate Maria celebrates receiving the Bob & Ellen Nichols Scholarship alongside New Horizons founders Bob and Ellen Nichols.

MORE THAN HOMEWORK

New Horizons students receive academic assistance, but the organization's mission has always extended beyond completing assignments or improving grades.

Tutors and mentors build consistent relationships with students. Staff encourage young people

to develop leadership, responsibility and confidence. Faith and character lessons give students an opportunity to learn about Jesus, His love for them and God's plan and purpose for their lives.
The results can be life-changing.

One of those students is Maria, a member of New Horizons' Class of 2025. Maria had been part of New Horizons since first grade. At graduation, Dr. Cunning presented her with the Bob & Ellen Nichols Scholarship as she prepared to attend Florida SouthWestern State College and pursue a healthcare career.
Reflecting on her New Horizons experience during her graduation speech, Maria said, "They didn't just help me academically; they helped me believe in myself."

Maria recalled struggling with motivation and keeping her grades up during middle school. Encouragement from New Horizons staff helped her recognize that she was capable of more than she realized. A simple incentive for earning A's and B's became a turning point, and Maria went on to remain on the A-B honor roll.

Her experience with New Horizons also shaped her faith. Through Bible lessons and Scripture, she came to understand God's love for her, particularly during difficult seasons of her life. Today, Maria plans to pursue a career in psychology, motivated by her desire to listen to, support and guide others.
"Students like Maria are why this anniversary matters," Cunning said. "There is something extraordinary about watching a first grader grow into a young adult who knows she is capable, knows she is loved and is ready to pursue her dreams. We get a front-row seat to those transformations, and it is an incredible privilege."

THE NEXT 25 YEARS
As New Horizons celebrates its anniversary, the organization is also looking ahead.
The needs facing Southwest Florida's children continue to evolve, but the commitment of New Horizons remains unchanged: meet students where they are, provide the academic and relational support, and surround them with people who believe in their God-given potential.
Throughout the anniversary year, New Horizons will celebrate through special events, student and alumni stories, community partnerships and a special community gathering planned for spring 2027.

"We are deeply grateful for every student and family who has trusted us, every volunteer who has pulled up a chair beside a child, every donor who has made this work possible, every church and community partner who has opened a door, and especially Bob and Ellen for saying yes 25 years ago," Cunning said.
"And we're not finished. There are more children to reach, more graduates to celebrate and more stories still waiting to be written."

Media opportunities:

New Horizons welcomes interviews with Dr. Linda Cunning, founders Ellen and Bob Nichols, alumni, students, volunteers and longtime supporters. Media representatives may also inquire about opportunities to visit a New Horizons neighborhood club and see the programs in action.

About New Horizons of Southwest Florida
New Horizons of Southwest Florida empowers under-resourced youth to reach their full potential through tutoring, mentoring, and faith and character-building. Through neighborhood-based programs serving K-12 students in Lee and Collier counties, New Horizons provides academic assistance, mentoring, character development, faith-building experiences and support that helps students graduate from high school with a plan for the future.

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