

Bush father, son celebrate reading Friday night

By [JOHN OSBORNE](#) ([Contact](#))
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Maria Segura, center, an Immokalee resident and mother of three children, begins to cry when she sees her son, Jose Segura, Jr., left, who came home from college at Ohio State University to surprise her. Segura, a former farm worker, spoke to the crowd at the Florida's Celebration of Reading on Friday night about how she furthered her education through the Family Literacy Academy in Immokalee to ensure that her younger children would not have to work in the fields. Former Gov. Jeb Bush, right, awarded Segura and her two youngest children four-year scholarships to college at the ninth annual event. Lexey Swall-Bobay/Staff



Former president George H.W. Bush greets the Rodriguez family from Port Charlotte as Florida Gov. Jeb Bush greets the Calderon family from Belle Glade, two families helped through the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative, following a press conference before the Sixth Annual Celebration of Reading at the Naples Grande Resort & Club Friday afternoon, March 10, 2006. David Ahnholz/Staff



Former President George H.W. Bush and his wife Barbara talk to the media as their son, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush listens during a press conference before the Sixth Annual Celebration of Reading at the Naples Grande Resort & Club Friday afternoon, March 10, 2006. The event benefits the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative of Florida. David Ahnholz/Staff



Former first lady Barbara Bush speaks to the media as her son, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush listens during a press conference before the Sixth Annual Celebration of Reading at the Naples Grande Resort & Club Friday afternoon, March 10, 2006. The event benefits the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative of Florida. David Ahnholz/Staff

NAPLES — Joined by his father, former President George H.W. Bush, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush hosted the Ninth Annual “Celebration of Reading” fund-raising event at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa in Estero on Friday night.

Former first lady Barbara Bush, who founded the Barbara Bush Foundation For Family Literacy shortly after her husband took office in 1989, was scheduled to appear at the event, but was unable to attend due to a bout with the flu.

“I’m honored to be here today hosting this event again with my beloved wife, Columba, and my dad, who is the most spectacular man I know,” Jeb Bush said to a loud chorus of cheers. “You’ll probably notice that the boss of our family – my mom – is not here. That’s only because the doctor literally ordered her not to come. This is the first reading event that she’s missed in nine years.”

Ten minutes earlier, the 41st President of the United States entered the ballroom at the Hyatt looking healthy and happy and energized as the enthusiastic crowd favored him with a long, sustained round of applause.

The \$250-a-plate, dressed-to-the-nines affair was held to benefit the Family Literacy Initiative, which has provided grants to more than 120 family literacy programs throughout the state since its inception.

This year's fund-raiser raised \$1.4 million, with an additional \$1.6 million pledged in in-kind contributions. The money will be distributed to 12 Family Literacy Academies in Florida, including the Jump Start program in Immokalee.

Previous Southwest Florida organizations that have benefited from the annual fund-raising event include the Immokalee Foundation, the Collier County Housing Authority, the Collier County Education Foundation and the Bonita Springs Literacy Council.

The literacy academies serve parents who are learning English as a second language or who are pursuing General Equivalency Diplomas while their children are enrolled in educational programming.

Jeb Bush said he was amazed by the philanthropy of Southwest Floridians in light of the country's struggling economy.

"This year, we are particularly grateful for your generous support," he said. "Reading opens new doors and it helps people live better lives."

An award-winning lineup of authors joined the Bushes at Friday's event, including Steve Doocy, co-host of "Fox & Friends" and a two-time New York Times best-seller; Jeffrey Engel, author of "The China Diary of George H.W. Bush" and a history teacher at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University; children's author Derrick Barnes; humorist A.J. Jacobs; and artist Edna Hibel, whose coffee table book is titled "The Sundial Ticking."

Former CIA Director Porter Goss, a Southwest Florida native who once served as congressman for the 14th District, which includes Fort Myers and Naples, also made a special guest appearance at the event.

Volunteer usher John Sickels and his wife, Janice, of Cape Coral, were among the hundreds of enthusiastic people crammed into the Hyatt ballroom Friday night.

"This fund-raising event is to make sure we have the resources we need to bring the literacy level in Florida up to a better standard," Sickels said. "That's what it's all about."

Official sponsors of the event were treated to a private luncheon prepared by Oprah Winfrey's former personal chef, a golf outing, a VIP reception and preferred seating.

For more information on the Florida Family Literacy Initiative, visit www.flafamilyliteracy.org.



Former President George H.W. Bush looks on as his son, Jeb Bush, the former governor of Florida, speaks during a press conference for the Ninth Annual Celebration of Reading at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point on Friday February 13, 2009. (John David Emmett/news-press.com)

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Bushes help raise \$1.4 million for literacy initiative

*By Dave Breitenstein
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The Bush family seemingly has been in power forever.

George H.W. Bush was president from 1989 to 1993.

Jeb Bush was Florida governor from 1999 to 2007.

George W. Bush was Texas governor from 1995 to 2000 and president from 2001 to January.

"There was a slightly embarrassing incident last week when Jeb, George and I all ended up in the same unemployment line," joked George H.W. Bush. "Not good. Not good."

The nation's 41st president rolled out a 4-minute, joke-laden speech at Friday's ninth annual Celebration of Reading event at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point in Estero.

It's a literacy fundraiser Jeb Bush brought to his state, and one that continues drawing big bucks even after all of the Bushes have left office.

Friday's \$250-per-plate dinner, combined with corporate donations, raised \$1.4 million for the Family Literacy Initiative.

Five published authors — Derrick Barnes, Steve Doocy, Jeffrey Engel, Edna Hibel and A.J. Jacobs — shared tales from their lives, and Jeb Bush unveiled a new literacy program called "Love. Read. Learn!" that will put books in parents' hands immediately after giving birth to a child.

The “Love” program targets babies, toddlers and preschoolers, and is another private literacy quest that will become critical as public schools face tough budgetary decisions in the coming years.

“Our nation is undoubtedly facing difficult times, and we know not-for-profits will bear a great burden in this economic downturn,” said Jeb Bush, 56.

Past donations helped Maria Segura, an Immokalee mother of four, move from the vegetable fields to the classroom, first as a student then as a teacher. Segura completed a GED and went to work as a teaching assistant for pre-kindergarten students.

All the while, Segura stressed to her own children that education could indeed give them a better future. Her oldest son is set to graduate from Ohio State University this spring and launch a career in architecture.

“When Juan Carlos crosses that graduation stage, instead of looking up at me with a smile and holding up a bucket full of tomatoes, he will be smiling at me holding a diploma,” said Segura, 44. “I couldn’t be prouder.”

While Segura’s testimony hit home for supporters of literacy programs, it was 84-year-old George H.W. Bush’s jokes that had the audience clamoring for more:

- On why he now walks with a cane: “All I say is never go hunting with Dick Cheney.”
- On why it’s better that former first lady Barbara Bush is back in Texas recuperating from the flu: “I’m very happy to be several states east of her.”
- On an angry, less-than-attractive female in San Francisco protesting the Republican’s visit, yelling, “Stay out of my womb”: “No problem, lady.”

Additional Facts

Participating Authors

- Derrick Barnes: “Ruby and the Booker Boys”
 - Steve Doocy: “Tales from the Dad Side” and “The Mr. & Mrs. Happy Handbook”
 - Jeffrey Engel: “The China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President”
 - Edna Hibel: “The Sundial Ticking”
 - A.J. Jacobs: “The Year of Living Biblically” and “The Know-It-All”
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Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, Barbara Calabro, Dr. Steven Calabro, Maria Segura and family, Sharon and Donald Jones.



Lee County

Bush family visits Bonita Springs for Celebration of Reading

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Former Florida governor Jeb Bush and his father, former President George H.W. Bush were in town today for the 9th annual Celebration of Reading at the Coconut Point Hyatt.

The event raised 1.4 million dollars for Florida literacy programs. As a special surprise, Jeb Bush presented a four-year college scholarship to Maria Segura, saying she is a success of child literacy programs. She was part of the JumpStart Family Literacy Academy for children.

Also today, the Bush family answered questions about the current state of the economy. Former gov. Bush gave his support to Republicans for not voting for the stimulus package.

"Had it been truly bipartisan from the beginning, then I think there would have been a willingness to cross party lines," he said.

Former governor Bush also dismissed any rumors of a presidential or Senate run. He joked that his father does have political aspirations for him.

When it comes to budget cuts for southwest Florida schools, governor Bush said the solution is in Tallahassee.

"You can't keep cutting forever," he said.

Fox 4's Justine Waldman asked former President Bush if he has any words of wisdom for Barack Obama on the economy.

"I don't even remember where I had lunch yesterday," he said.

Barbara Bush usually attends the celebration but was sick with the flu.
