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Safe Start Celebrates 10th Anniversary in Central Florida

Thousands of Children Prepare for Florida's Pool Season with Water Safety Program that Teaches Life-Saving Techniques at YMCA of Central Florida Family Centers

ORLANDO, Fla. ... More than 10,000 children – some as young as six months old – have learned life-saving techniques over the past 10 years as part of Safe Start, the innovative water safety program launched by the YMCA of Central Florida with support from the Dr. Phillips Charities in 2002. The Y will recognize the success of this vital program during a special event to kick off Central Florida's pool season at the Aquatic Center YMCA (8422 International Drive) on April 19.

Florida loses children under age five to drowning more than any other state. The Y of Central Florida, the only associations across the nation to offer Safe Start instruction at its Family Centers since 2002, spearheaded and rolled out the program after forging a partnership with Infant Swimming Resource and Dr. Phillips Charities. By taking on this leading cause of preventable childhood death and injury, the Y is committed to providing this needed resource to families and keeping swimmers of all ages safe in the water in a quest to reduce overall drowning statistics in our communities.

Safe Start teaches survival swimming techniques by way of lessons to children from six months to six years old with private daily instruction from certified instructors over a period of six weeks. Children first become proficient in the rollback technique to rotate from a facedown position to float facing up in the water. Next, children learn how to swim-float-swim to safety and exit the water. Parents are required to attend each lesson, and receive the Safe Start Parent Resource Book and valuable water safety education to ensure Safe Start lessons are reinforced at home. Refresher courses and comprehensive aquatics programs at Y Family Centers provide ongoing support to keep children safer around the water for the rest of their lives.

"Floridians are fortunate to have year-round access to water, and whether your family enjoys spending time in the backyard pool and area beaches or participating in aquatic activities and programs at our Family Centers, it is vital that we first teach our kids how to be safe in the water," said Jim Ferber, President and CEO of the YMCA of Central Florida. "Safe Start is a proven program that has undoubtedly reduced childhood drowning in our community. We offer this early intervention as part of our robust aquatics program, commitment to water safety and goal to address pressing issues, like child drowning, all to help advance our cause of making our Central Florida communities stronger."

"My son ventured onto a dock and fell into the water near a boat hoist," said Carrie Ferenac, local parent, "Before my husband and I could get into the water, he had flipped over, and was floating – tennis shoes and all. It all happened in a matter of seconds and I was so relieved that the lessons he learned from Safe Start helped him survive. All children deserve a safe start with water."

For many children, Safe Start is an introduction to lifelong enjoyment of aquatic activities for fun, fitness and health. Thousands of children, teens and adults—many of whom would not have access to a pool without the Y—take swim lessons at local Family Centers each year. This year alone, the Y expects to offer over 50,000 swim lesson for swimmers of all ages and skill level. Certified instructors continue to teach important water safety skills and help individuals improve their stroke techniques or fitness levels, while sharing fun new ways for everyone to participate in a variety of pool activities that keep them active. Swimmers with a competitive streak can join swim teams, dive teams or play water sports with coaching from several former Olympians who also call the Y's pools home. Central Floridians who simply enjoy relaxing poolside take comfort in knowing that every Family Center pool is

supervised by certified lifeguards, making it easier to take advantage of fun features such as water slides, fountains and special pool events at many Y locations.

For more information about Safe Start instruction and YMCA of Central Florida aquatic programs, please visit www.ymcacentralflorida.com or www.safetstartusa.org.

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About the Y

The [YMCA of Central Florida](http://www.ymcacentralflorida.com) is one of the area's largest nonprofits committed to strengthening the local communities it serves. It is a diverse organization of men, women and children joined by a shared commitment to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility. Each day 25,000 Central Florida residents are impacted by the Y when a mentor inspires a child, individuals make healthy choices and a community comes together for common good. In 2010, this YMCA Association of over 1,600 employees across 6 Florida counties impacted over 225,000 residents and invested, during a down economy, \$10.2 million in its local communities through neighborhood improvement projects. Also, this Y provided \$9.2 million in financial assistance to children and families that resulted in lasting personal and social change.