Providing job training and placement, accessible housing, education, disability services, community outreach, and other needed services in Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee Counties for 50 years.
A golden history

Goodwill Industries of Southwest Florida is celebrating its Golden Anniversary in 2016, but the history of the organization goes back even further than the past 50 years.

The Goodwill seeds were first planted in our area in 1955. Fort Myers News-Press publisher Chesley “Chet” Perry visited a fledgling Goodwill organization in St. Petersburg as part of a Rotary Club project. The programs that Goodwill presented for people with disabilities awed Perry. He and other Rotarians pledged their support to Goodwill Industries-Suncoast, and Suncoast promised to return the favor by helping start a Goodwill program in Fort Myers.

The Goodwill started with a Boy Scouts “Good Turn Day” to collect donations. By 1959, our area had its first Goodwill store, located in downtown Fort Myers, as well as several Goodwill-Suncoast donation boxes. At that time, most donations were shipped up to Tampa.

Perry rallied a group of local businessmen to work towards establishing a Goodwill workshop for people with disabilities in Fort Myers. This group, which became Goodwill’s first board of directors in our area, was a “Who’s Who” of Southwest Florida. It included Fort Myers Mayor Paul J. Myers, City Councilman William C. Persons, Lee County Sheriff “Snag” Thompson, Dick Pritchett, Jr, and Connie Mack, Jr., among many others. In 1965, the committee purchased a former citrus packing plant in North Fort Myers. The land, on Bayshore Road in North Fort Myers, would be Goodwill’s Southwest Florida home for the next 48 years.

The organization was incorporated as Goodwill Industries of Southwest Florida 50 years ago, in 1966. It operated as a branch of Goodwill-Suncoast for another 15 years. On January 1, 1982, Goodwill Industries of Southwest Florida was granted autonomy to serve Charlotte, Collier, Hendry, Glades, and Lee Counties.

Through the last half-century, Goodwill has seen many changes and experienced exponential growth. The nonprofit’s single store in 1966 has expanded to 30 stores in 2016. Goodwill no longer operates a “sheltered workshop” to employ people with disabilities, but instead now offers social services to more than 42,000 Southwest Floridians.

The people who come to Goodwill for services still include those with disabilities, but also include individuals with other barriers, like education, housing, and economic factors. Employment training and job skills remain Goodwill’s main focus, but Goodwill also helps by offering disability services, education, mentoring, community outreach, recreation, and accessible housing.

For 50 years, Goodwill has been committed to helping the people of Southwest Florida become more independent and self-sufficient—and the organization plans to continue that mission for many decades to come.
Here in Southwest Florida, Goodwill helped 1,341 people secure jobs in 2015, primarily through our Job-Link Centers. Goodwill’s Job-Link coordinators are trained employment specialists who help clients access computers, search for jobs online, and create resumes and cover letters. These specialists also can help Job-Link visitors apply for federal unemployment benefits, healthcare, Medicaid, and other programs.

Goodwill offers numerous other employment services in our region. Pathways to Work is an on-the-job training program for adults with disabilities. The Goodwill SWFL MicroEnterprise Institute helps aspiring small business owners create a feasibility plan and offers startup micro-loans to eligible graduates. Goodwill’s new training and certification programs have helped auto technicians and restaurant employees earn necessary credentials.

Disability services are also a large part of Goodwill’s mission. Since 1997, Goodwill has provided safe and affordable disability-accessible apartments. Today, more than 300 Southwest Floridians live in Goodwill housing. The Pathways to Opportunity and Trailways Camp programs offer recreation, camaraderie, and independence to adults with disabilities.

Education is an important stepping-stone to employment for many people. Goodwill’s education programs include Able Trust High School High Tech, a career exploration and mentoring program for high school students. Goodwill also operates the Goodwill L.I.F.E. Academy, a Lee County Charter school for middle and high schoolers with intellectual disabilities.

Finally, Goodwill provides social services at four neighborhood outreach centers in Lee County. In total, more than 42,000 Southwest Floridians received some type of assistance from Goodwill last year. That total amounts to one in every 29 residents of our region.
It sounds like a one-liner, but every word is true: Kim Yape has worked at Goodwill for so long, she used to ride her horse to work.

Yape, Goodwill’s longest-term employee, was referred to the nonprofit as part of a school-to-work transition program for youth with disabilities. She joined the organization more than 42 years ago, and works as a material handler at the Goodwill Opportunity Center in Tice.

“I’ve made so many friends over the years,” says Yape. “I have my family, then I have my Goodwill family.”

With more than 900 employees in Southwest Florida, Goodwill is one of the region’s 40 largest employers. While many of those employees work at Goodwill short-term to receive training in the retail business, Goodwill boasts nine employees that have been with the organization for more than half of its 50 years.

Mark and Susanne Hankins will celebrate a combined 69 years with Goodwill in 2016. Susanne, then Chesolosky, joined the Goodwill family in 1978, and met her husband Mark when he came to Goodwill in 1985. The pair was married two years later. Today, Susanne is a processor in North Cape Coral, and Mark is a material handler at the Opportunity Center.

Goodwill boasts two more 30-year employees, Mary Keese and John Collins. Keese, who celebrated her 34th anniversary with Goodwill earlier this year, worked for nearly two decades at Goodwill’s plant before joining Goodwill’s South Fort Myers store team. Collins has been with the nonprofit 31 years in Fort Myers and Lehigh Acres.

29-year employee Mark Albert has worked at nearly all of Goodwill’s Charlotte County stores. Since Hurricane Charley, he has been a mainstay at the Port Charlotte Retail & Donation Center. John Devereaux has been in the Goodwill family for 25 years, working in the processing facility before moving to his current position in the E-commerce department. Devereaux, who has physical disabilities and uses a wheelchair, says his job at Goodwill has changed his life.

“For twenty years I was homebound. All I did was watch TV,” says Devereaux. “I could count on one hand all the friends I had. Now with Goodwill, with both my hands and my toes, I couldn’t count all the friends I have.”

Angeline Burnett also recently celebrated a quarter century with Goodwill. Burnett started at the Clewiston store in 1990, and transferred to Moore Haven when that store opened in 2014.

“I got to cut the ribbon,” she laughs.
For 50 years, Goodwill Industries of Southwest Florida has served our community as part of the nationally-recognized Goodwill Industries International family. We are honored to have been voted The Best nonprofit organization in our area by the readers of the News-Press.

Goodwill began in 1902 thanks to the Rev. Edgar Helms, a Methodist minister in Boston. It was Helms’ mission to collect, mend and repair gently used goods to then help mend and repair the lives of disadvantaged and disabled individuals in his community. Helms provided people in need with pathways toward hope, gainful employment and self-sufficiency. His compassion remains at the very core of Goodwill’s organizational values and mission: Strengthening individuals, families and communities with a hand up in their efforts to reach their fullest potential.

The resale of donated merchandise is just one way that Goodwill supports the many services it provides to our community. Additionally, the Southwest Florida Goodwill Foundation strategically supports Goodwill’s mission. The Foundation acts as the donors’ advocate to make the best philanthropic choices that are both powerful and innovative. Immediate gifts, legacy plans, gifts-in-kind, real property and events like the Festival of Trees generate revenue every year. That revenue is then transformed into working investments in education, employment training, housing, and empowering people to reach self-sufficiency.

Celebrate Goodwill’s Golden Anniversary by investing thoughtfully toward its mission. You can help right away to mend and repair the often overlooked in our community.

For information about the Foundation and ways to make an impactful, charitable investment:

Contact Melodie Turish, Director of Philanthropy at 239-995-2106, ext. 2279, or by email at melodieturish@goodwillswfl.org.

CONGRATULATIONS GOODWILL on 50 years of serving the Community
Golden Anniversary Events

Goodwill will celebrate its Golden Anniversary tonight at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point, with Fashion Through the Decades and its annual Breakthrough Awards. Although it’s too late to register for tonight’s event, the coming months will be filled with celebrations:

**Goodwill Golf Classic**
- Saturday, May 21
- Coral Oaks Golf Course
- $60/player or $240/foursome
Men and women of all ages and golf experience levels are invited to play in this tournament, which raises funds for the Southwest Florida Goodwill Foundation. www.goodwillswfl.org/golfclassic2016 or 239-652-1649 to register or sponsor a hole.

**Pathways to Opportunity Art Show**
- Reception: Tuesday, May 10, 5:30 p.m.
- On display: May 4-24
- Marco Island Center for the Arts: 1010 Winterberry Dr., Marco Island
Pathways to Opportunity, a day program for adults with intellectual disabilities, will display their “Fashion Through the Decades” themed artwork at the Marco Island Center for the Arts. Marcoislandart.org or 239-394-4221

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Festival of Trees
• November 30-December 4
(Hours vary)
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Painting with Purpose
• Friday, June 17, 7:00 p.m.
• Painting with a Twist, Gulf Coast Town Center, Fort Myers
• $45/person

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