

Good morning everyone. I have the distinct privilege of presenting to the Tampa Bay community, The March of Dimes' most recent recipient of the Lawton Chiles Advocacy and Service Award. This year's recipient is Estrellita "Lo" Berry, the illustrious President and CEO of REACH-UP, Inc. The award, created by the March of Dimes in 1999, recognizes an individual whose work has positively influenced the advancement of maternal and child health in the state of Florida in several areas.

Anyone who been in the presence of Estrellita Berry, better known as "Lo" or "Lo" Berry, for any length of time, knows that she has an unparalleled passion for maternal and infant health. The hectic schedule that keeps her on the go, is all to help moms, infants and dads, their families and the community to have a fair opportunity to attain good health and assure that no one is disadvantaged in that regard.

"Lo," always shared a concern for the health of others. She told journalist Ernest Hooper that even in first grade at College Hill Elementary, she wondered why some of her classmates seemed to be in better condition in terms of attitude, physical appearance or physical health. 'I always bee-lined to those who seemed to have more problems.'" Those early days of having a caring attitude and years of hard work led Lo where she is today, a nationally recognized leader in the field of maternal and child health with a proven track record for leading community based programs to realize positive maternal and infant health outcomes. She also is a tremendous advocate for documenting results through rigorous scientific research and has guided REACHUP's partnership with its Research and Evaluation Team at USF/COPH and Baylor College of Medicine.

Lo is involved in numerous and varied maternal and child health activities. She was a founding member of the Hillsborough Healthy Kids, Inc., Board of Directors and chaired its committee to recruit foster parents. She is currently a member of the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County Board of Directors and numerous Coalition committees. As a past president of the National Healthy Start Association (NHSA) Board of Directors, Lo continues active service on the Board.

Lo also is a member of the Blue Ridge Institute for Southern Community Service Executives. She has also actively participated on the Adolescent Health Advisory Board, Pregnancy Associated Mortality Review (PAMR), Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR), Home Visiting Advisory Committee and National Health Equity Institute, and served as chair of the Black Infant Mortality Work Group for the 2016-2021 Hillsborough County Title V Service Delivery Plan. She is a very active volunteer with her church, New Mt. Zion M. B. Church, ministries and has won many awards as well.

In leading REACHUP, Inc., Lo realized that the maternal and child health arena (MCH) has traditionally ignored the critical role of fathers in improving birth outcomes. In "bringing the 'F(ather)' to MCH", she is a national trailblazer, with REACHUP,

Inc. staff serving as key facilitators of NHSA's "Dads Matter" Initiative and members of the American Public Health Association Men's Health Caucus. Under her leadership REACHUP, Inc. continues to be involved in various local, regional and national fatherhood efforts. When REACHUP, Inc. is at the table, everyone know that fathers will not be ignored.

None of us were surprised that Lo's response to being named the recipient of the March of Dimes' Lawton Chiles Advocacy and Service Award was: "I am humbled and grateful to the distinguished March of Dimes for this prestigious award," Lo said. "It is such a remarkable honor because I was hired by the Lawton & Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers & Babies in 1998 and worked there until we transitioned from USF/COPH to REACHUP, Inc. in 2009. Additionally, what has really blessed my heart is the joy this award brings to so many special people on my behalf."

In 2007, at a reception celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Chiles Center, I introduced myself to Governor Chiles' son, Ed. He smiled broadly and told me how proud his daddy would be of the work we at Central Hillsborough Healthy Start were doing. "Remember," he told me, "Daddy would say that you all are doing God's work." Now that the Central Healthy Start Program Lo Berry has led since we were at the Chiles Center in 1998 is the premier of **12** REACHUP programs, I can only imagine how elated the Governor would be. And considering that our recent evaluation report shows that we have reduced the infant mortality rate by 56% in our catchment area, I believe the Governor would tell a humble and unassuming Lo Berry that "it's a sorry frog that won't croak in [her] own pond." But since she won't, I'm delighted that, in this instance, the March of Dimes is doing it for her.

As we celebrate Lo, we would be remiss if we did not point to how tremendously committed she is to her family. She is the daughter of Mrs. Bertha Washington and the late Samuel Washington. She is the wife of Rev. Dr. George Berry, mother of Aaron and mother-in-law of Tiffany Greene Berry and grandmother to Bryson.

Again, it is my honor to present the recipient of the 2017 Lawton Chiles Advocacy and Service Award, Mrs. Estrellita "Lo" Berry.