

Gala celebrates impact of instilling hopes and dreams in kids | NONPROFIT REGISTER

By Joanne Davidson 10/29/2025



Teacher of the Year Eva Pasterkamp, left, with presenter Arlene Hirschfeld.
(Photos by John Leyba for Clayton Early Learning)

It's one thing to talk about hopes and dreams, and quite another to make them come true.

At Clayton Early Learning, the emphasis is on the latter.

As William Browning, Clayton's president and chief executive officer, said on Oct. 23 when 400 friends of the Denver-based nonprofit gathered at Infinity Park Event Center in Glendale for the Futures Grow Here Gala:

“We are in the hopes and dreams business. And we know that hopes and dreams begin with every child having an exceptional start in life – which depends deeply on the stability of their family. That’s why we’re building something extraordinary: a vibrant, holistic ecosystem right here on our campus that’s designed to serve not only Clayton families, but the broader community, as well.”

With that, Browning announced that within the year, in partnership with Denver Health and the “extraordinary leadership” of its chief executive officer Donna Lynne, ground will be broken for a clinic on the Clayton campus that will offer pediatric and adult primary care, dentistry and mental health services for Clayton families and the surrounding northeast Denver neighborhood.

The gala also was the occasion for Eva Pasterkamp, Clayton’s lead infant and toddler teacher, to be honored as the 2025 Charlotte M. Brantley Teacher of the Year.

Arlene Hirschfeld presented the award, noting that “As a former teacher myself, I carry a profound respect for the work of early childhood educators. They are the hearts of our communities, shaping not just the future of our children and families, but in every sense, the future of Colorado. This award does more than recognize excellence in teaching. It reminds us of what’s at stake and what’s possible when we invest in our youngest learners.”

Hirschfeld praised Pasterkamp for bringing “Extraordinary intentionality to her work. Her classroom is a haven, a place where infants feel safe and loved, where language blossoms and where families are welcomed, respected and supported.”

The evening’s keynote speaker was Jimmie James, author of “Playing from the Rough,” a memoir about one man’s quest to become the first person to play each of America’s 100 greatest golf courses in a single year. It was an odyssey that brought him face to face with the gulf between his impoverished childhood in the Jim Crow South and the successful executive he became.

James told the audience he had visited Clayton Early Learning earlier that day and “When I looked into the eyes of those dreamers with their radiant smiles and boundless curiosity, I saw me. I got a little choked up. Just like I did standing on the first tee of Augusta National, I was taken back to my own childhood and the struggles that came with it. I wondered how many of the kids playing on that playground, sitting in those classrooms, would go on to greater heights than I have because of the work that Clayton is doing with them and their families.”

James’ appearance at the Futures Grow Here Gala was coordinated by Cindy Schulz, former chair of Clayton’s board of trustees. Her brother, Gary Crowell, had been James’ high school golf coach.

Cindy and her husband, Steve, hosted three tables at the gala; their guests included Cindy Halaby, Scot and Susan Blake Smith, Carol and Pete Ziverts, Keifer Voss and Jan and Miles Cortez.

Kyle Speller, hometown voice of the Denver Nuggets, served as master of ceremonies and added a sporting touch to his introduction of dignitaries in attendance by announcing their names in game lineup style. The group included Denver City Councilman Darrell Watson; Adeeb Kahn, executive director of Denver's division of Economic Development and Opportunity, and Dr. Lisa Roy, who got in the spirit by taking a pretend shot at an imaginary basketball hoop when Speller described her as Colorado's "center" for early childhood. Roy directs the Colorado Department of Early Childhood.

Other guests included Lorii Rabinowitz, chief executive officer of the Denver Scholarship Foundation; Paul Lhevine, president/CEO of the Colorado Nonprofit Association; Ethan Hemming, president/CEO of Warren Village; Justin Cooper, president of Saunders Construction; Joann Cambuzzi, a partner with KPMG; and Tina Martinez, chair of the Clayton board of trustees, with her husband, Jason.

About the organization: Clayton Early Learning, 3801 Martin Luther King Blvd., Denver, uses a multi-generational, place-based approach to give all children an exceptional start. This is done by empowering families to achieve long-term success by helping them develop habits that enable the unlimited potential of their children to become a reality. Clayton's programs reach over 500 families and children per year.

Website: claytonearlylearning.org



Clayton supporters Hillary and John Morgridge.
(Photos by John Leyba for Clayton Early Learning)



Clayton parent Iran Munoz Martinez with keynote speaker Jimmie James, author of “Playing from the Rough.”
(Photos by John Leyba for Clayton Early Learning)



Dr. Lisa Roy, executive director of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood,
(Photos by John Leyba for Clayton Early Learning)



Clayton Early Learning trustees Naomi Lacewell and Daniel Prager with William Browning, Clayton's president/CEO.
(Photos by John Leyba for Clayton Early Learning)

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