FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:                      **For information contact:**

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**Hunter Institute on Young Children to be Part of FGCU’s College of Education**

*Mission is to enhance early childhood education and teacher development*

FORT MYERS, Fla. – An institute dedicated to improving early childhood education and researching how children learn will relocate this fall to Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU).

     The Hunter Institute on Young Children was established in 2007 at The College at Brockport, a campus of the State University of New York system in western New York. Its mission is to enhance the growth and development of children through quality pre-school and elementary education and to promote professional development among teachers and care providers.

     Willard and Judy Hunter of Bonita Springs, longtime benefactors of The College at Brockport, funded the institute’s creation through a charitable remainder trust (CRT) and a charitable gift annuity (CGA) and will continue to support its mission at FGCU.

     “We purposely funded this institute with a CRT and a CGA so we can be involved in its growth while guaranteeing its long-term future and success,” said Wil Hunter. He is the retired president and CEO of Optem, a Rochester-based custom optical instrument design and manufacturing company he co-founded in 1984 following a 19-year career with Bausch and Lomb Inc. He was a member of The Brockport Foundation Board for 17 years, serving as its chairman from 2001 to 2003.

     Judy Hunter, a pre-school teacher for 20 years until her retirement in 1999, knows firsthand the issues that educators face and the value of engaging children in learning early in life.

     “We hope the work of the institute will result in a better understanding of how young children learn and how to help them in the classroom,” she said. “Pre-school education is critically important to a child’s future. If we can teach young children to be comfortable in the classroom, they will gain significant self-esteem and will be able to accomplish virtually any goal they set for themselves academically, physically and socially.”

     At FGCU, the Hunter Institute will be administered by the College of Education and will continue to sponsor an annual conference, as well as an annual symposium of experts, both focusing on issues surrounding young children. It’s an honor for the college to be the institute’s home, according to Dean and Professor Marci Greene, who considers it an asset to the Southwest Florida community as well as the University.

     “The institute provides us with an excellent avenue for increasing our ability to collaborate with others about the need for quality early childhood education,” she said. “It will greatly assist us in providing teachers, families and other professionals with cutting-edge information and best practices on educating young children.”

     For more information, contact Greene at mgreene@fgcu.edu or (239) 590-7781.

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