



*Children's Board chair Valerie Goddard orders gourmet coffee at the Art for Autism's Artistas Café at Mercedes-Benz.*

## **Children's Board Awardee Opens Coffee Shop to Aid Kids with Autism**

**TAMPA, FL** (Jan. 13, 2011) – Customers at Mercedes-Benz of Tampa's new location can not only enjoy a cup of complimentary gourmet coffee but help promote employment of young adults with autism at the same time.

It began when a small non-profit foundation, Art for Autism, started by Pier and Vicky Westra, worked with the Children's Board of Hillsborough County to learn how to write a business plan. The plan aimed at their dream to help children with autism spectrum disorder, like their own daughter.

They completed a class presented annually by the Children's Board and Art for Autism became a finalist and award recipient of the board's 2010 Innovative Business Plan competition. The Art for Autism Foundation used the award and the encouragement of Children's Board chair Valerie Hubbard-Goddard to team up with Mercedes-Benz and open a coffee bar staffed by young adults with autism at the dealership, located at 4400.N. Dale Mabry Highway. The coffee bar, known as Artistas Café, also offers tea, cocoa and snacks. Non-customers pay affordable prices for the items.

"The Westras are an example of what can happen when citizens reach out to make a difference to our community's most vulnerable children. Their commitment and dedication to children with autism, which started as a dream, is now evidenced in a new business," said Hubbard-Goddard.

“It was the Children’s Board Innovative Business Plan competition that required us to fully develop the concept as well as the business plan for Artistas Café,” Vicky Westra said. “The Children’s Board believed in our vision and provided the seed money that enable us to launch our first Café. This will benefit four young adults diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder with positions as artistas at Mercedes-Benz dealership.”

The Westras, who are in the gourmet coffee business themselves and donate a tenth of their earnings to the Art for Autism Foundation, see the partnership with Mercedes-Benz as the first of more potential opportunities to support the growth and development of children and youth with autism, and provide them with opportunities for employment.

Children’s Board CEO Luanne Panacek said the board’s Innovative Business Plan competition is aimed at helping non-profits develop a business plan to generate additional funds so they can build capacity.

For more information about the Art for Autism Foundation and opportunities to open a coffee bar run by youth with autism, contact Vicky and Pier Westra at (813) 282-7066 or [Vicky@artforautism.org](mailto:Vicky@artforautism.org). See the Art for Autism Foundation website at [http://javamo.com/autism\\_foundation.shtml](http://javamo.com/autism_foundation.shtml).

To learn more about the Children’s Board’s annual Innovative Business Plan competition, contact Bobbi Davis or Irene Hill at (813) 229-1884.

*The Children’s Board of Hillsborough County serves as the leading voice and advocate for children and families in our community. The board is the only organization of its kind in Hillsborough County that generates revenue to help children and families. The Children’s Board is recognized nationally for its contributions to best practices in policies and programs aiding children and families. Citizens may visit [www.childrensboard.org](http://www.childrensboard.org) to learn more about the board’s programs.*