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Media Contact: Amy Thompson

amyt@connectedpb.com | 561-328-6044

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Community Rallies at 2024 Fire Truck Pull, Raising \$26,500 for Autism Support

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., Sept. 4, 2024 — The 2024 Fire Truck Pull, held Saturday, Aug. 31, 2024, at Gardens Park in Palm Beach Gardens, brought together teams of first responders, business leaders, college athletes and more for a day of competition and philanthropy. This year's event raised an impressive \$26,500 to benefit students and adults with autism who attend Connections Education Center, a nonprofit school in West Palm Beach.

In a thrilling display of power and teamwork, teams competed to see which could pull a real fire truck 30 feet fastest. The Palm Beach Gardens Police Department emerged as the champions in the Fastest Pull category, completing the 30-foot fire truck pull in just 10.03 seconds. The Palm Beach Gardens Fire Rescue team claimed victory in the Lowest Combined Weight Pull category, pulling the fire truck 30 feet within the three-minute time limit with a combined team weight of only 658 pounds.

With 15 participating teams, the event was not only a showcase of physical strength but also a testament to the community's generosity. The ZAZ Squad stood out in the fundraising efforts, earning the title of Highest Fundraising Team by raising \$11,465. Zach, one of the school's adult clients and a member of the ZAZ Squad, led the individual fundraising efforts, bringing in \$7,220 and securing the title of Highest Fundraising Individual.

"We are encouraged by the community's enthusiastic support for individuals with autism," said Debra Johnson, executive director and principal of Connections Education Center. "The funds raised will directly enhance the educational and developmental opportunities for our students and adults with autism. Every participant, donor, sponsor and spectator played a role in making this event a success. And we couldn't have done it without the contributions of Palm Beach Gardens Fire Rescue and Station 61."

Connections serves 140 individuals, many of whom might not have access to high-quality services without the school. More than 80% of the school's students live below the poverty line, 94% come from minority families and over 50% live in single-parent homes or with grandparents.

This year's Fire Truck Pull also featured a Special Needs Registry enrollment drive by the Palm Beach Gardens Police, allowing families with children who have autism or other special needs to register their children, ensuring that police are better informed in case of an emergency.

For event highlights and more information, visit connectedpb.com/fire-truck-pull.

About Connections:

Connections is a nonprofit educational center that delivers high-quality, specialized instruction to students with autism in Palm Beach County. They serve students ages 3-22 years and offer an innovative program for adults with autism. Learn more at connectedpb.com.

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