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Scholarships aid healthcare workers

Lee Memorial funds future employees education

BY MICHELLE L. START
Correspondent

Tara Morales has always been interested in science and the human body, so a career in nursing made sense.

After high school, she began taking some of the pre-requisite classes while waiting tables and tending bar. Then in 2001, she dropped out to take care of her father, who had kidney disease. Shortly afterwards Morales' schooling was further delayed when she became pregnant with her son, who is now 2 1/2.

However, thanks to a \$2,200 a year scholarship from Lee Memorial Health System, Morales is on target to graduate with her nursing degree in May.

"I get financial aid," said Morales, 28, of Cape Coral. "This money helps to pay for my child to go to preschool so I can go to school."

Morales' scholarship is part of \$260,000 that is being awarded to 157 people by the health system.

"These will be our future healthcare workers," said Mike Polito, workforce development planning coordinator for LMHS. "It



is (a program) only open to local residents. It is a wonderful opportunity for them and for us here locally."

Since the scholarship's inception in 1990, more than \$1.2 million has been awarded. Of that, \$700,000 has been given out over the past four years.

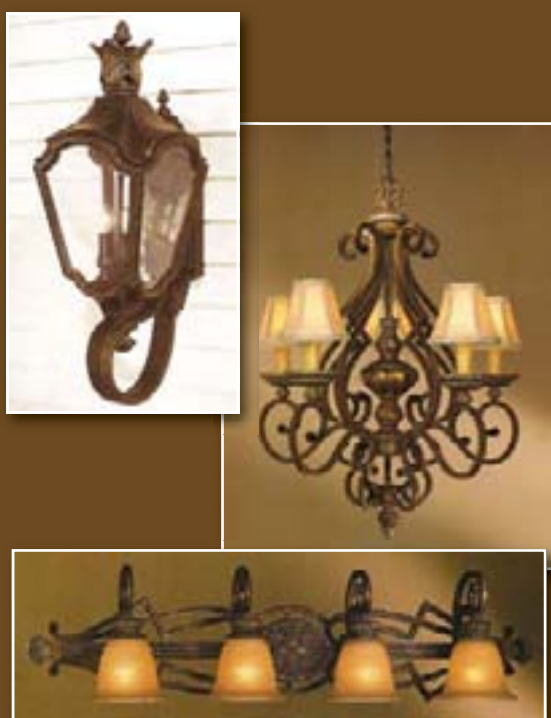
The grants go to employees, volunteers, their family members and local residents who are in financial need and are interested in pursuing healthcare careers.

Morales already works for LMHS at The Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida, where she is employed in the extended care unit that offers daycare services to medically needy or disabled children.

The money for the scholarships was provided by Cape Coral Hospital Auxiliary, Eloise M. Carlson Educational Grant Fund, Jim Nathan Endowment Fund, Lee Healthcare Resources, Lee Memorial Auxiliary, Lee Memorial Health System Foundation, Nathan Family Educational Excellence Fund, Southwest Florida Regional Medical Center Auxiliary and private donations. ■

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