

GIVING

How important are scholarships to our community?

BY CAROL MCLAUGHLIN

Chief Program Officer,
Southwest Florida Community Foundation

The Southwest Florida Community Foundation awards over \$550,000 in scholarships annually to area students. The endowed scholarship funds that allow us to do this are established by donors who know the importance of an education and have the ability and desire to make a difference. Donors create these permanent legacies in memory of a loved one, to honor a family member or provide educational incentives for future community leaders.

The scholarship awards vary from \$500 for a one-time scholarship to \$20,000 for a four-year scholarship. Do they make a difference in the student's life? Absolutely. But more than that, many of the students awarded scholarships from the Community Foundation return to the area to practice what they have learned in college and become a productive part of our community.

Our scholarship recipients keep the foundation informed of their progress and they tell us about the importance of receiving the scholarship; not only of the financial reward, but also that it gave them the confidence to succeed because someone believed they were worthy of the award. Perhaps the scholarship award meant they would not have to find two or even three jobs to support them while pursuing their education. These students are focused on achievement as well as validation that they can succeed and attain their goals.

One of our students said it well. She spoke of the importance of receiving a scholarship from the Community Foundation and how her family came as political refugees from South America.

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That is the power of a scholarship - the confidence it gives these young minds to forge ahead and reach their goals.

Scholarships are critical because they can be targeted at a local level, focusing on groups of students meeting a wide range of criteria. Additionally, private aid complements federal and other funding sources by making college more affordable for both low and middle income families and broadening student educational choices. Private scholarships can be leveraged with state and federal aid to lessen the burden of financing one's college education.

Many of these students who received scholarships come back and focus their talents on the community. Many have matured in their ability to understand diversity and leadership. They become productive members of society, giving their time and talent to community projects and programs, many for non-profit organizations.

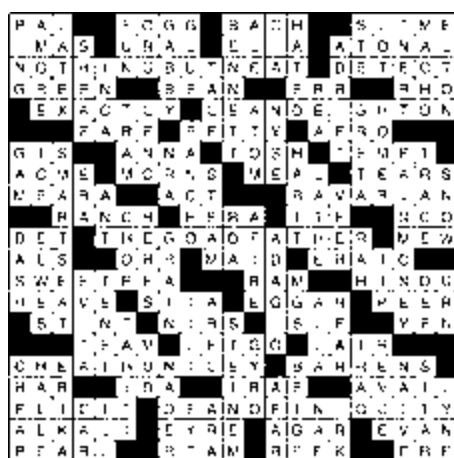
Is it our mission to support these students with scholarships? Absolutely. The Community Foundation's role is to connect donors and their philanthropic aspirations with evolving community needs. Our community needs productive, responsible citizens who are willing to give back to the community that helped them succeed. Our donors want to help students in their mission to succeed. Together, it is a win-win situation.

The Southwest Florida Community Foundation has been supporting the communities of Lee, Charlotte, Collier, Glades and Hendry through endowed funds for more than 30 years. With assets of more than \$57 million and 314 endowed funds, the community foundation has provided more than \$30 million in grants and scholarships to the communities it serves.

For more information, please call 274-5900, or visit their web site at www.floridacommunity.com. ■

PUZZLE ANSWERS

8	7	5	6	9	1	3	2	4
4	3	1	8	2	7	6	5	9
2	6	9	5	3	4	7	1	8
9	4	3	1	5	8	2	7	6
7	1	6	2	4	3	9	8	5
5	2	8	9	7	6	1	4	3
1	5	2	3	8	9	4	6	7
6	9	7	4	1	5	8	3	2
3	8	4	7	6	2	5	9	1



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