

Lee students selected for scholarships to pursue careers in chemical industry

BAYTOWN, TX — After leaving school 10 years ago to focus on his family, Christopher Patterson willingly accepted a pay cut to be able to return to Lee College and finish what he started: pursuit of an associate degree.

Now majoring in process technology, Patterson is one of three Lee College students who will receive scholarships this year from the Community College Petrochemical Initiative (CCPI). Crisol Napoles and Edmeade Prentice were also selected and joined other scholarship recipients Aug. 3 at the ExxonMobil office in Baytown for a recognition luncheon. In total, CCPI awarded \$45,000 in scholarships to 38 students from all nine community colleges along the Texas Gulf Coast that can be used for tuition, fees, books or other training program expenses.

Funded through a grant from ExxonMobil, CCPI is a collaboration of the Texas Gulf Coast community colleges to recruit and train the next generation of petrochemical and construction trades workers for the Houston-Galveston region. Since its launch five years ago, ExxonMobil has contributed more than \$2 million to CCPI to support training in petrochemical fields like computer-aided drafting and design, electrical technology, instrumentation, machine technology, millwrighting, pipefitting, process technology, and welding. Lee College is the lead institution in the initiative.

“I have an analytical mind and as I dive into process technology, I always want to know more,” said Patterson, who will graduate from Lee College in a year. “The CCPI scholarship means so much to me. I had to make several sacrifices in order to come back to school and even though it may be hard work, I know it will pay off for me and my family in the long run.”

Potential salaries average nearly \$100,000 a year for skilled workers in the growing chemical manufacturing industry, and companies are projected to need more than 50,000 new workers in the Gulf Coast area over the next 10 years. In a keynote address to the scholarship recipients, Mike Zamora, director of Americas Regional Manufacturing for ExxonMobil Chemical, praised the work of the CCPI and noted the wealth of opportunities awaiting students as they prepare to embark on petrochemical careers.

“The Community College Petrochemical Initiative partnership is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when employers and educators work together,” Zamora said. “Encouraging and developing a well-educated and skilled workforce is vital to the industry’s success in meeting a growing global demand for chemical products and continuing economic growth and prosperity in Gulf communities.”