

Foundation brings donors together with scholarship recipients

For the individuals and businesses that donate to the Lee College Foundation, there is no greater proof of the positive impact of their generosity than meeting and hearing the stories of students awarded tuition and textbook scholarships.

Students like Maryori Portillo, a first-generation college student and recipient of the Wallace Heaner Tuition Scholarship and John and Stella Pepper Textbook Scholarship who had children at a young age and dropped out of high school. After earning her GED and experiencing difficulties in her first try at higher education, Portillo came to Lee College and enrolled in two classes: English and speech. Instructors recognized she had special talent, but the cost of out-of-district tuition and other expenses nearly forced her to quit school after just one semester.

“They immediately saw potential in me that I didn’t see in myself and introduced me to the Honors Program,” Portillo shared April 7 at the 15th annual Foundation Scholarship Breakfast, where donors connected with scholarship recipients and learned firsthand how the funds made a difference in their lives.

“Thanks to the scholarships, I was able to return to school,” she said. “I can’t tell you how wonderful it is to go to sleep without college tuition keeping you up at night. It’s a weight lifted off your shoulders and a worry gone. I would not be standing here without your help.”

Or students like Audra Smith, a process technology major and intern at Chevron Phillips Chemical who received a workforce scholarship from the East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA). EHCMA donated \$170,000 to Lee College this year for student scholarships and other support for craft and technology programs.

Just before she started classes, Smith lost her home to a fire and learned her mother had been diagnosed with cancer. Four months into the program, her mother passed away — and soon after, so did her father and grandfather. Knowing she would not have to worry about paying for school helped her persist in the program despite her losses, determined to earn her degree and keep the promises she made to herself and her family.

“Workforce scholarships help us, as students, achieve our greatness,” Smith told managers and leaders from EHCMA’s member companies in late March at a student and donor networking reception hosted by the foundation. “By donating money for these scholarships, you all are changing lives every day.”

Under the leadership of its Board of Directors, the Lee College Foundation has raised outside funds since 1968 to provide for student needs. The fund balance for the foundation now exceeds \$10 million and all students are eligible to receive scholarships — those pursuing academic and technical degrees, as well as those enrolled full-time, part-time, in dual-credit classes for high-school students to earn college credits, in non-credit classes offered by the Center for Workforce and Community Development, and in the Lee College Huntsville Center prison program.

Although the foundation has historically focused on accepting scholarship funds, board members consider other worthwhile initiatives that directly affect student success and promote the student’s ability to reach their education goals. To that end, tax-deductible

contributions from industry and private donors also support the Student Success Fund, created to help those facing extraordinary circumstances pay for college-related expenses that might otherwise derail their journey.

“One of the most heartwarming things about Lee College is knowing how much this community loves this institution,” said Pres. Dr. Dennis Brown. “The consistent outpouring of generosity helps ensure students can do the three most important things: enroll, persist and graduate. We want them to get here, stay here and leave here with a degree.”