



Non-Profit Donates to Florida Students

By *Emily Zaborniak*



As announced in a press release earlier this month, first-generation college students in Florida have received a gift that will “keep on giving” for years and years. Helios, a nonprofit organization, donated \$10 million in the form of endowment gifts to the Board of Governors Foundation of the State University System and the Foundation for Florida’s Community Colleges.

Per its website, the mission of Helios is to serve as “a permanent Endowment dedicated to enhancing the quality of life and livelihoods of individuals in Arizona and Florida by supporting initiatives that encourage participation, increase access, and enrich the learning experience leading to the successful conclusion of post-secondary education.”

Rising to the generosity of Helios, the state of Florida has declared it will match the donated funds. The funds supplied by the two donors will create the highest public-private scholarship for first-generation students in the history of Florida. First-generation college students are those who are the first in their families to pursue and earn college degrees.

Governor of Florida Jeb Bush remarked on the historical gift, “We appreciate the Helios Foundation’s generosity. A college education can make all the difference in the life of an individual, and this donation will touch the lives of many students from families across Florida.”

The Board of Governors Foundation of the State University System and the Foundation for Florida’s Community Colleges will each receive \$5 million. The money allocated to the Board of Governors Foundation will “generate income” to be matched by the First-Generation Student Grant Program. The amount awarded to the community college fund will be matched with First-Generation and Phillip Benjamin Matching Grant Program funds.

The Helios Foundation is proud and certain that its investments will establish a perpetual source of funding. “By investing millions of dollars in Florida’s systems of higher education, we are investing in the state’s future,” said Helios President Paul Luna. “Through these scholarships, first-generation students will have the chance to further their education, make college a reality, and blaze a trail for others in their families.”

Potentially, the endowments can produce income and, cyclically, act as continuing resources for future generations. The funds will be dispersed to 11 universities and 28 community colleges.

The Helios Foundation insists that studies prove that a prospective student’s decision to pursue a college education is highly influenced by whether his or her parents went to college. Being a first-



generation college student poses challenges and obstacles, which spring from having less preparation for academia, less accessibility to information about the college experience, and, sometimes, lack of emotional and financial support. This last factor may force first-generation students to balance coursework with employment.

“To be the first in a generation to attain a higher education is a great feat, and Helios is proud to be a part of making these dreams come true,” said Helios CEO Vince Roig. “Our hope is that these first-generation students will inspire their siblings and other family members to further their education, benefiting generations to come.”