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Scholarships open doors for underprivileged students

By Don Matz



As we enter the holiday season, the gift of knowledge and the opportunities it brings are at the front of my mind.

Since my early childhood, I have understood the importance of a great education and have made it one of my core values. My parents were huge proponents of high-quality learning, instilling in me the idea that with greater knowledge comes greater opportunities.

A recent experience during a school visit in Ormond Beach drove this home more than ever for me.

Through my work as president of Tower Hill Insurance Group, I have the honor of participating in some amazing community experiences, but when I visited Calvary Christian Academy in October to see our company's contributions to the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program in action, I was blown away by the students I met. The visit was heartwarming.

A group of Calvary Christian Academy students delivered a personally made thank-you poster to me to bring back to my Tower Hill family, thanking us for our contributions since 2011 of over \$3.1 million to the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program. In the spirit of giving, we recently made an additional pledge of \$2.2 million for 2017 to the program, administered by the nonprofit organization Step Up For Students. The students' gratitude for being able to attend their school — life changing, as one student described — helped me fully understand the impact of these scholarships.

How does it make this impact? Step Up For Students helps provide lower-income families with the ability to find an approach to learning that works best for their children, an option they usually would not be

able to have or afford. It is a remarkable not-for-profit scholarship funding organization that seeks to empower Florida families who are challenged by limited educational choices. Scholarships awarded through this program often give parents a way to afford the most appropriate learning options for their children, giving them the tools to reach their full potential. Our contribution to the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program will help serve the nearly 104,000 Florida students who receive these scholarships, about 3,213 in Volusia County alone.

Working at Tower Hill, I am fortunate in my role to help protect Florida's homes and businesses from all types of disasters and calamities. Though our company has evolved tremendously since I started in 1996, our commitment to our original core values — choices, confidence, responsiveness and trust — remains strong.

It is both humbling and gratifying to be able to offer families a way to instill the same lesson in their children that I received from my parents regarding the importance of a quality education. It brings me great pride that Tower Hill's commitment provides our state's students with a bridge to a brighter future through Step Up's amazing mission. Tower Hill loves to give our members a sense of peace of mind, and we want to give Florida families similar peace of mind with better learning options for their children.

While all schools face challenges, I was witness to success in action during my visit to Calvary Christian Academy, which is successful in overcoming challenges and preparing its graduates for the next level of education. However, not every child is granted the opportunity to choose the school and learning approach that best works for him or her. Tower Hill agrees that Florida's children deserve the best education possible, and that's why we believe in the work of Step Up For Students.

One Calvary Christian Academy student, Mia, said, "I am so in love with my new school." I am thankful to know Mia and her fellow students have the gift of a great education. And we at Tower Hill are so tremendously proud to support this program and Volusia County families.

Matz is president of Gainesville-based Tower Hill Insurance Group, one of Florida's largest residential property insurers. Photo provided by Matz.