



-STEP UP FOR STUDENTS- NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2016

VOLUME 3



Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits announces monumental \$125 million contribution to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program

BY PAUL SOOST

Step Up For Students and Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (Southern Glazer's), the nation's leading wine and spirits distributor, announced recently that Southern Glazer's has committed \$125 million to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program for the 2016-17 school year.

Southern Glazer's contribution – the largest in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program's 15-year history – will fund more than 20,000 scholarships in the 2016-17 school year. This is Southern Glazer's seventh consecutive year of participating in the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program, bringing the company's total to a record-breaking \$315 million since 2010.

"Southern Glazer's is committed to being a leader in our community, and as such, it gives us great pride knowing

that we are providing scholarships for thousands of deserving children for the next school year," said Southern Glazer's CEO, Wayne E. Chaplin. "We are thrilled that our contribution will offer parents more educational options and the opportunity to send their children to a school that best meets their learning needs."

Step Up For Students helps administer the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which provides scholarships to qualified lower-income K-12 schoolchildren throughout Florida. Scholarships are funded by corporations that receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for their contributions. The program allows recipients to choose



between a scholarship to help with private school tuition and fees, or a transportation scholarship to attend an out-of-district public school.

During the 2016-17 school year, Step Up For Students expects to serve more than 92,000 students throughout Florida.

"Southern Glazer's is an amazing partner and champion of the school choice movement. Their extreme generosity will touch the lives of more than 20,000 children this year alone, and their families across the state of Florida," said Doug Tuthill, Step Up For Students president. "When I think of the impact this donation has, and the lives that will be changed because of it, I am truly humbled. On behalf of Step Up and the families we serve, we deeply appreciate Southern Glazer's unwavering support."

New school year kicks off; enrollment and applications surge

BY LISA A. DAVIS

As Florida schools were kicking off the 2016-17 school year, Step Up For Students team members busily worked on applications for both Florida Tax Credit and Gardiner scholarships. Step Up administers both scholarships and while the state directly funds Gardiner Scholarships, Step Up also works with corporate donors to secure funding for the income-based FTC Scholarships.

For the income-based scholarship, Step Up expects to have more than 92,000 lower-income students enrolled for the new year, and another several thousand more using the Gardiner to customize their learning.

"This is going to be the biggest year yet," said Step Up President Doug Tuthill. "We're elated to be able to offer learning options to this many Florida students who need it most. I am proud and humbled by our scholarship operations staff for the incredible work they have been doing, and the long hours they have put in, to get these applications processed and awards into the hands

of these deserving families."

Step Up staff has been working tirelessly completing applications, as well as working on regular year-round duties. More than 106,000 students have been awarded the tax-credit scholarship with nearly 91,500 enrolling by Aug. 22. Of those, about 61,200 are renewal scholars.

This year's scholarship is worth up to \$5,886 for tuition assistance or \$500 for transportation funding to an out-of-district public school.

Lawmakers broadened the income-based scholarship this year to students whose household income level was slightly higher than the 185 percent of the poverty level previously required, similar to the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. If found eligible, many of these families can receive a partial scholarship to offset tuition costs.

The changes in the law, however, still require that the lowest-income families be awarded first.

"Our focus has not changed in that our priority is to serve low-income families.

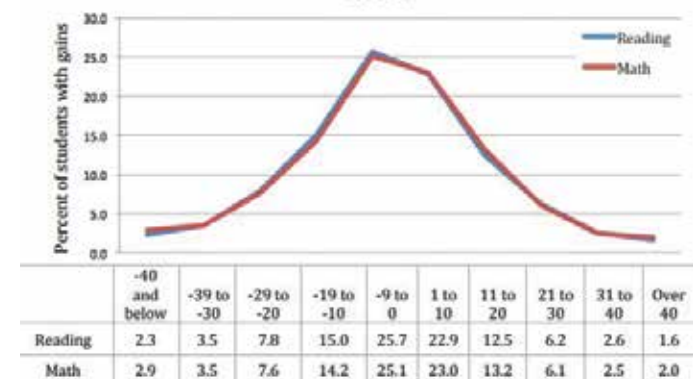
However, even working class families struggle

Report: Florida Scholarship students make gains despite disadvantages

BY PATRICK R. GIBBONS

Florida's tax credit scholarship program continues to enroll some of the most disadvantaged students from among the state's lowest-performing public schools, according to the latest evaluation of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program. After they receive scholarships and enroll in private schools, they keep academic pace with all students nationally, based on their standardized test results.

Figure 3: Distribution of test score gains for FTC students, 2013-14 to 2014-15



Researchers found that, on average, low-income students who receive Florida Tax Credit scholarships make comparable gains to their peers at all income levels nationally. Source: FTC annual program evaluation.

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DONOR UPDATE

In January, the 2016-17 cap for the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program opened. The program grew by 25 percent to allow for up to \$559 million in tax credits to be reserved for scholarships. Step Up For Students donors have enthusiastically responded to this challenge with their generosity. Through Aug. 31, more than \$535 million has been pledged to Step Up For Students. Because of this corporate support, Step Up continues to be the largest tax credit scholarship program in the country and expects to fund 92,000 scholarships this school year alone. Step Up extends its gratitude to the following companies that have pledged through August 31:

- 3M Company
- ABC Fine Wine and Spirits, Inc.
- Allegiant Travel Company
- Allstate Insurance Company
- American Coastal Insurance Company
- American Integrity Insurance Company
- American Strategic Insurance
- American Traditions Insurance Company
- Amerisure Insurance
- Ark Royal Insurance Company
- Auto Club Insurance Company of Florida
- AutoNation, Inc.
- Axiom Bank
- AZZ Specialty Repair and Overhaul, LLC
- Babcock & Wilcox Enterprises
- BAC Florida Bank
- Beall's Outlet Stores, Inc.
- Ben Hill Griffin Inc.
- Bernie Little Distributors, Inc.
- Bill Currie Ford
- Breakthru Beverage Group
- Breitburn Energy Partners LP
- Brown & Brown, Inc.
- Brown Distributing Company
- Burkhardt Sales & Service
- Caldwell Trust Company
- Capacity Insurance Company
- Cargill Incorporated
- Carriage Services, Inc.
- Carroll Distributing Company
- CEMEX USA
- CenterState Bank of Florida, NA
- Centric Group, LLC
- Cerner Corporation
- CertiPay
- Champion Brands, Inc.
- Chubb
- Circle K Stores
- Citizens First Bank
- Coach, Inc. & Subsidiaries
- Cone Distributing
- Continental National Bank
- Covanta
- Crowley Maritime Corporation
- Dairyland Auto and Cycle Insurance
- Daytona Beverages, LLC
- Dearborn National Life Insurance Company
- Delta National Bank and Trust Company
- Denny's, Inc.
- Dick's Sporting Goods, Inc.
- Double Eagle Distributing
- Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Inc.
- Duke Energy
- Eagle Brands Sales
- Energy Insurance Mutual
- Euler Hermes North America Insurance Company
- EverBank
- FCCI
- Federated National Insurance Company
- FineMark National Bank & Trust
- First National Bank of South Miami
- FirstAtlantic Bank
- Florida Community Bank NA
- Florida Distributing Company
- Florida East Coast Railway, LLC
- Florida Family Insurance Company
- Florida Peninsula Insurance Company
- Florida Public Utilities Company
- FOSSIL
- Frontline Insurance
- Gap, Inc.
- GEICO Companies
- Global Imaging Systems, Inc.
- Gold Coast Beverage, LLC
- Gold Coast Eagle Distributing, L.P.
- Goldring Gulf Distributing
- Ground Works Solutions, Inc.
- Guarantee Trust Life Insurance Company
- Guardian Life Insurance Co.
- Gulf Power
- Gulfstream Property and Casualty Insurance Company
- Hanover Insurance Group
- HCA
- Health Care Service Corporation
- HEICO Corporation
- Heritage Property & Casualty Insurance Company
- HMSHost Corporation
- Humana Inc.
- Hyland Software Inc.
- IBERIABANK
- Installed Building Products
- International Wine & Spirits, Inc.
- Intuition Ale Works
- J.J. Taylor Distributing Florida, Inc.
- Jefferson Bank of Florida
- JM Family Enterprises, Inc.
- Johnson Brothers of Florida
- Johnson Controls
- Kemper Home Service Companies
- Kforce Inc.
- LEGOLAND Florida
- Lincoln Heritage Life Insurance Company
- Lowe's Companies
- Lynch Oil Company, Inc.
- Marriott Vacations Worldwide Corporation
- MEDNAX, Inc.
- Mercury Insurance Company of Florida
- Modern USA Insurance Company
- National Beverage Corp.
- North Florida Sales
- Old Republic National Title Insurance Company
- Oxford Life Insurance Company
- Packaging Corporation of America
- Parker Hannifin Corporation
- Peace River Distributing, Inc.
- Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Co.
- People's Trust Insurance Company
- Petro-Canada America Lubricants Inc.
- Philadelphia Insurance Companies
- ProAssurance
- Read Conmigo, sponsored by Infinity Auto Insurance
- Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company
- Republic National Distributing Company, L.L.C.
- Rockwell Collins
- Rosen Hotels & Resorts
- S.R. Perrott, Inc.
- Sabadell United Bank
- Safepoint Insurance Company
- Safety National Casualty Corporation
- Sagicor Life Insurance Company
- Saxon Business Systems, Inc.
- Schweitzer-Mauduit International Inc
- Seavin, Inc. / Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards and San Sebastian Winery
- Security First Insurance Company
- Security Mutual Life Insurance
- Senior Health Insurance Company of Pennsylvania
- Smith & Nephew
- Southern Eagle Distributing, Inc.
- Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits
- State Farm
- St. Johns Insurance Company, Inc.
- Stephens Distributing Co.
- Summit Bank
- Synchrony Financial
- Sysco Central Florida, Inc.
- Sysco Jacksonville, Inc.
- The Bank of Tampa
- The Doctors Company
- The GEO Group, Inc.
- The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc.
- The Lewis Bear Company
- The Main Street America Group
- The Vitamin Shoppe
- The WhiteWave Foods Company
- Tractor Supply Company
- Tri-Eagle Sales
- UCB, Inc.
- United States Liability Insurance Company
- UnitedHealthcare
- Universal Health Services, Inc.
- Universal Insurance Company of North America
- UPC Insurance
- Urban Outfitters, Anthropologie, and Free People
- USAmeriBank
- U.S. Bank National Association
- Value Pawn an EZCORP Company
- Vera Bradley
- W.S. Badcock Corporation
- Walter Investment Management Corp.
- Waste Management
- Wayne Densch, Inc.
- Westcor Land Title Insurance Company
- Westfield Insurance
- Wright National Flood Insurance Company
- Wyndham Vacation Ownership
- Zeno Office Solutions
- Zoll Medical Corporation

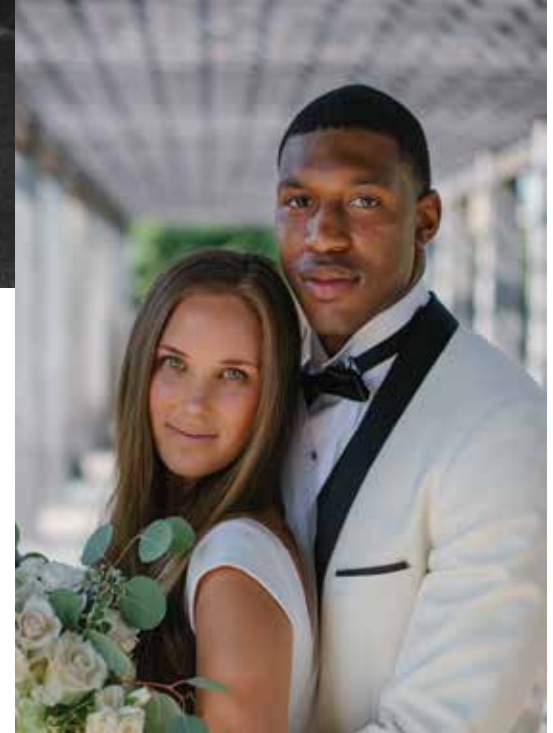
Companies: Claim your tax credit

If your company has enrolled in the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program this year and has not yet notified us, please let us know so that we can extend our gratitude to you and assist your company with taking the necessary steps to receive your tax credits, including the required Certificate of Contribution for your tax returns. If your company has not yet notified us of your pledge, please do so by emailing Debbie Woerner at dwoerner@sufs.org.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Travis Blanks
Mortgage Loan Officer
Clemson, SC



BY GEOFF FOX



The joy in Travis Blanks' voice was obvious. He had recently returned from scenic Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, where he went on a honeymoon with his new wife and college sweetheart, Chandler. The couple married on

June 25, 2016.

Back home in Clemson, South Carolina, he spoke as he took a lunch break from his new job as a mortgage loan officer at Oconee Federal Bank, where some customers recognize him instantly.

Less than a year earlier, Blanks was a star linebacker for the University of Clemson Tigers football team that made it to the national championship game, where it lost to Alabama, 45-40, in an instant classic.

Blanks, who earned a sociology degree at Clemson, entered the National Football League draft following the national title game, but was not selected.

Although Blanks had always dreamed of playing in the NFL, the 22-year-old said he is perfectly content.

"It was tough not realizing my dream like I wanted to, but I have a great job; I have a degree and I met my wife," he said. "I'm not really walking around with any disappointments."

Blanks' positive outlook has always been an asset. At 6-foot-1 and 210 pounds, he was considered too small to be an impact player for Clemson, but he proved critics wrong.

In his senior year, he registered 43 total tackles, made several stops against rival Florida State University and played with fiery determination in the championship contest. He accomplished that after sitting out his junior year with a knee injury.

While Blanks' personal drive has never been in question, he has had help along the way.

In 2009, the year Blanks entered high school, his mother,

Carol Hutto, heard about Step Up For Students through administrators at North Florida Christian School in Tallahassee.

Since the closest neighborhood school had low graduation rates and a floundering sports program, Hutto, a single mother of four, pursued the scholarship. Her application was accepted and Blanks spent his high school years at North Florida Christian.

The school became something of a haven for Blanks, whose father was in prison during his time there.

"It's a Christian environment," Hutto said. "They teach kids about the Bible and religion, and it's a very tight-knit group of people. They're very supportive. It's smaller than a regular public school, so we thought it would be fitting for him."

"He was able to meet some very good people who helped shape his future."

Pastor Randy Ray, who has been at North Florida Christian for about 25 years, was one of those people.

"Travis is one of the most exemplary students we've had; he's in the top five," Ray said. "First of all, he was a good citizen. You're not a good student unless you're a good citizen. He was a great athlete and all kinds of things, but we've had a lot of great athletes."

"He was a part of our community. He loved it here, and we loved him. He was serious about what he did, but he didn't take himself too seriously. He had a gift of doing things well, but he could laugh at himself if things didn't go perfectly."

"Step Up allowed him to be a part of our community," Ray said.

When Blanks earned a football scholarship to Clemson, the family – including an older sister and two younger brothers – moved to South Carolina to be near him.

A commercial insurance agent with BB&T, Hutto has since relocated to Fort Myers and is planning to apply again for Florida Tax Credit Scholarships for her 15-year-old twin sons.

While Blanks said he has left the gridiron behind, he is realizing other dreams.

His recent wedding to Chandler, Hutto said, "was beautiful."

"They've been together three strong years, during the most difficult times of their lives – at college," she said. "It was a gorgeous time for two gorgeous people."

Blanks also is settling nicely into his new career.

"No matter what kind of job you get, they're going to have to train you to do what they want you to do – even if I had a finance degree," he said. "I know how to interact and talk to people, and meet their needs."

"I'm just trying to provide for my wife, but I love my job. We're a community bank, so I get to have a personal relationship with my customers. I'm dealing with people, not just sitting around in a back office somewhere."



HEICO®

the workforce of our state. We want to keep these kids motivated and help them develop their talents, if not for HEICO in the future, but for other companies as well," Macau said. "We want to contribute to a brighter workforce in the future."

Headquartered in Hollywood, Fla., HEICO (NYSE: HEI and HELA) is a fast-growing aerospace, industrial, defense and electronics company that has a worldwide reach. The 55-year-old company provides products that are found on large, commercial regional, business and military aircraft, as well as on a large variety of industrial turbines, targeting systems, missiles and electro-optical devices.

It is a company that takes pride in doing good work and building strong relationships with its customers. In fact, for the 11th consecutive year, HEICO was recently ranked by Forbes as one of the 100 Most Trustworthy Companies in America.

"We're very proud of that," Macau said. "We get a lot of awards, but when you start talking about corporate governance and transparency and you get this sort of ranking, it really means something. It's quite an award."

Part of HEICO's relationship building is equally important in the communities where it does business. Corporate giving is key to this, Macau said. This includes partnering with schools, particularly STEM schools, near its corporate offices in Hollywood. But when the company wanted to expand its reach, it partnered with

Step Up For Students.

"What I think we were missing was that we need an opportunity to provide a much broader impact on Florida's youth, not just locally, but throughout Florida. This [partnership with Step Up] is an opportunity to help kids who need it most take advantage of opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have, and we're happy to help with that," he said.

With that in mind, HEICO partnered with Step Up For Students for the first time in 2014-2015.

"We are truly thankful for HEICO's support. We love that they were already helping education and wanted to do that throughout the state and are able to do so through Step Up's scholarships," said Step Up President Doug Tuthill. "Our goal is to provide as many educational options as possible, so HEICO sharing that mission is wonderful."

Macau said he knows his company's investment is a wise one.

"It is important to us to give back in ways that not only benefit the youth of Florida, but in the long run we need a high-talent pool for the workforce. And we want to pull from that and keep them right here in Florida," he said. "We want to keep these kids motivated and help them develop their talents if not for HEICO in the future, then for other companies in Florida, too."

He wants to continue partnering with Step Up in the future.

"I'm humbled we're able to do this to help so many kids," Macau said. "It's something I hope we can continue long into the future."

BY LISA A. DAVIS



HEICO's partnership with Step Up For Students doesn't just make good business sense, it's an investment in Florida's future overall, said Carlos L. Macau, HEICO executive vice president and chief financial officer.

And for that reason the company recently pledged to support Step Up For Students for the third year and doubled its initial investment of \$500,000 to \$1 million, funding about 164 scholarships for the 2016-17 school year.

"We need to be able to pull talent from the labor force for our company, and with this partnership we have the ability to have an influence on our future workforce and



for students

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NEW SCHOOL YEAR FROM PAGE 1

with finding the right school for their children,” Tuthill said. “It’s tough to afford private school at those income levels as well. With the expansion set forth by the Legislature, we can start assisting these families find the best school for their children, too. And that’s very exciting.”

Also through the second week of August, more than 11,800 Gardiner applications had been started with about 5,600 students with certain special needs awarded for the new school year. The average Gardiner Scholarship is worth \$10,000.

This state-funded scholarship is also administered by Step Up and is for Florida students 3 years old through 12th grade or age 22, whichever comes first, with one of the following disabilities: autism spectrum disorder, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, spina bifida, Williams syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome or intellectual disability (severe cognitive impairment). Also, students ages 3, 4 or 5 deemed “high risk” due to developmental delays may be eligible for the year they apply. It allows parents to personalize the education of their children with unique abilities by directing money toward a combination of programs and approved providers. These include schools, therapists, specialists, curriculum, technology – even a college savings account.

Both scholarships are still available for the 2016-17 school year. Income-based scholarship applications will be accepted until Sept. 30. No new applications will be accepted after this time.

Gardiner applications remain open indefinitely.

REPORT FINDINGS FROM PAGE 1

The report is the eighth annual evaluation of the test score progress, and the second conducted by researchers at the Learning Systems Institute at Florida State University.

Researchers examined the reading and math scores of 34,469 students in 1,285 private schools during the 2014-15 school year. Scholarship students in grades 3-10 have been required to take a state-approved nationally norm-referenced since 2006.

The tax credit scholarship program is administered primarily by Step Up For Students. It is the largest corporate tax credit scholarship program in the country. Of the 69,950 students who received scholarships during the 2014-15 school year, 67 percent were black or Hispanic, and 53 percent lived in a single-parent household. The average household income was \$24,135, or only 5 percent above poverty.

FSU researchers measure academic growth for students by comparing their national percentile ranking for one year to the next. A difference of zero reflects that the student has experienced the same academic growth as all other test-takers. In a finding that aligns with previous evaluations, researchers determined “the typical [scholarship] student tends to maintain his or her relative position in comparison with others nationwide. It is important to note that these national comparisons pertain to all students nationally, and not just students from low-income families.”

New students could receive scholarships if their families had low enough incomes to qualify for federal school lunch programs, but researchers said scholarship students tended to be even more disadvantaged, both economically and academically, than students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and remained in public schools. Scholarship recipients were more likely to qualify for free (as opposed to reduced-price) lunch than students who qualified but did not participate in the program.

As in past years, the researchers found that public school students who chose the scholarship were among the lowest academic performers in the public schools, and, similarly, that the scholarship students who returned to public schools also had lower test scores than those who remained on scholarship in private schools.

For schools with greater than 30 scholarship students enrolled, state law also requires the schools test scores be published. Researchers published average learning gains for students in 198 schools, 40 more than in the previous year. The scores for those individual schools can be found in the report’s appendix, available at www.StepUpForStudents.org.

This is the official newsletter for Step Up For Students, published four times a year.

About Step Up For Students:

Step Up For Students provides legislatively authorized K-12 scholarships and related support to give economically disadvantaged families the freedom to choose the best learning options for their children.

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