



NEWS

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Local Organizations Gather Elected Officials, Business Leaders to Discuss Talent Development in Central Florida

Heart of Florida United Way and the Central Florida College Access Network Host Destination Graduation: Building a 21st Century Workforce

ORLANDO, Fla. (Sept. 1, 2015) – Research shows that by 2025 the majority of the workforce will require a post-secondary degree or high-quality credential. Currently in Central Florida, less than 40 percent of residents hold these qualifications. To address this gap, more than 100 elected officials and business leaders met at the National Entrepreneur Center in Orlando on Sept. 1 for Destination Graduation: Building a 21st Century Workforce, a convening to discuss how Central Florida can further develop a workforce to meet the demands of an evolving economy.

Through presentations from Rick Weddle, president of the Orlando Economic Development Commission, and Troy Miller, associate director for research & policy with the Florida College Access Network, as well as testimony from recent graduates, two key factors were identified as barriers – financial aid.

“For many low-income or first-generation high school graduates, a post-secondary experience seems out of reach,” said Ray Larsen, vice president of collective impact for Heart of Florida United Way. “However, with the right road map, motivation and support along the way, it is very attainable.”

Financial barriers are identified as one of the leading factors in why low-income students do not pursue post-secondary educations. However, last year in Central Florida alone, more than \$17 million in Pell Grants, a needs-based federal grant that students do not have to repay, were left on the table.

“The missing link between need and financial aid is FAFSA,” said Niurka Ferrer, Director of Transitions Planning of Valencia College and chair of the Central Florida College Access Network. “In Central Florida, less than half of graduating high school seniors even completed the FAFSA form last year, which is the gateway to receiving aid and pursuing a degree or credential. As a community, we must make this a priority.”

Leaders were asked to consider how Central Florida can increase the percentage of Floridians ages 25 to 64 with a high-quality post-secondary degree or credential to 60 percent by 2025.

The host committee for Destination Graduation included Congressman Daniel Webster; Senator Andy Gardiner; City Commissioner Tony Ortiz; David Fuller, president of the SunTrust Foundation; Diana Bolivar, president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Dr. E. Ann McGee,

president of Seminole State College, and Robert H. (Bob) Brown, president/CEO of Heart of Florida United Way.

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$26.6 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida's crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

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