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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Polk State College Foundation celebrates \$35,278 in scholarship funds from Florida College System Foundation

August 21, 2025 | WINTER HAVEN – The Polk State College Foundation celebrated a generous contribution of \$35,278 from the Florida College System Foundation on Wednesday in the Winter Haven Fine Arts Building among students, faculty, and staff who expressed gratitude. These funds will support three transformative scholarship programs that continue to expand access to higher education for students across Florida.

The scholarships include:

- **Nursing and Allied Healthcare Scholarship** – Supporting students pursuing careers in nursing and allied health. Last year, this scholarship benefited 964 students across 28 institutions.
- **21st Century Dream Makers First Generation Scholarship** – Focused on first-generation college students, this scholarship served 228 students statewide last year.
- **First Generation Matching Scholarship** – Also aimed at first-generation students, this scholarship supported 581 students last year.

The need for nurses and healthcare professionals in Polk County remains urgent. According to the Florida Center for Nursing, Polk County has one of the lowest nurse-to-population ratios in the state, with a significant gap in the supply of registered nurses compared to demand. This shortage is especially critical as the region's population continues to grow and age, increasing the demand for healthcare services.

Polk State serves more than 450 students in its Associate in Science (ASN) and Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs, with a steady increase in enrollment over the last two years. The program's ASN graduates continue to exceed state and national averages on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) with a 96.7% pass rate in 2024.

Twenty-seven percent of college students in Florida are first-generation and more than half of them rely on federal financial aid to pursue their education, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. At Polk State, approximately 44% of students utilize federal Pell grants. These students often face unique challenges in navigating college without the benefit of family experience or support systems.

Polk State College and the Polk State College Foundation are proud to partner with the Florida College System Foundation to further expand access to higher education and career opportunities for students who need it most.

"The Florida College System Foundation and our Board of Directors are driven to ensure quality higher education is accessible, affordable and truly transformative for our students across the State of Florida. This contribution to Polk State College will benefit students who will gain access to high quality education and workforce training," said **Karen Moore, Chair of the Florida College System Foundation Board of Directors**.

"These statewide scholarships are aimed at mirroring the nursing shortage and helping students who are the first in their family to attend college," said **Amanda Roden, President and Executive Director of the Florida College System Foundation**.



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"We are grateful to the Florida College System Foundation for this generous investment in Polk State students, many of whom are the first in their families to pursue higher education, and many who rely on financial assistance to achieve their academic and career aspirations. These scholarships will not only transform lives and empower students; they will also help build a stronger, highly skilled workforce for our community," said **Polk State President Angela Garcia Falconetti**.

"I am a proud Polk State Nursing Student... [and] I will be walking that graduation stage... as a first-time-in-college graduate for my family. Because of the scholarships and grants that I have received, I am graduating nursing school with not one penny of debt. The trajectory of my family's life has been changed and it's due to the aid we've received," said **Polk State Nursing Student Kaitlyn Wright**. "The Polk State Foundation has been a blessing to me and my family. Their investment in me is also an investment in my kids, and for that I am forever grateful. The Florida College System Foundation's generosity is helping aid the college in continuing to help other students with stories like mine create a new future for themselves. For that, I wholeheartedly thank you."

"Supporting students in nursing and the allied health programs, as well as those who are first in their families to attend college, is not just about financial aid — it's about opening doors to opportunity and creating a stronger, healthier community. These scholarships help us invest in the future of Polk County," said **Steve Warner, Polk State Vice President for Resource Development and Executive Director of the Polk State College Foundation**.

About Polk State College

Located in Polk County, Florida, and established in 1964, Polk State College is a multi-campus institution serving more than 14,000 students with Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Science, Associate in Arts, and Associate in Science degrees, as well as 9,000 individuals in a wide range of certificate and workforce training programs. The College also operates three charter high schools.

Polk State's advantages include small class sizes; hands-on learning; dedicated faculty; day and night classes; online options; affordable tuition; excellent financial aid; and a diverse community and vibrant student life, including fine arts opportunities, clubs, and intercollegiate athletics.