

Grant to help students get training beyond high school

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SARASOTA — Sarasota students hoping to pursue education and training beyond high school are getting a major assist from a local philanthropy collaboration called Talent4Tomorrow (T4T).

Created by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce in 2013 to develop local workforce talent, the T4T partners collected \$62,500 in matching funds to procure a \$50,000 grant from the Florida Philanthropic Network. The money will be used to finance programs that will guide local students toward available state and federal sources of tuition and training money.

The T4T strategy attempts to identify and cultivate "a pipeline of skilled workers to meet the demands of local employers," according to Mark Pritchett, president and CEO of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, which took the lead in the grant application. Matching funds were also supplied by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation.

Financial assistance has long been available through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) program, and the grant money will, through the schools, help publicize those opportunities as well as other sources of public and private funds. The campaign also intends to create an awareness of career opportunities in the Sarasota job market and how to explore them with internships and mentoring. T4T also plans to target student demographics "traditionally underrepresented in higher education," according to Greg Luberecki of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

According to the Florida College Access Network, 59 percent of Sarasota students were eligible for Pell Grants, but fewer than half of them filled out FAFSA forms in 2012-13. That left more than \$2 million on the table. But the T4T initiative paid big dividends last year during the annual Florida FAFSA Challenge, which qualifies high school seniors for Pell Grants and other post-secondary assistance through competition.

In 2016, Sarasota schools took eight of 15 competitive awards. The Florida College Access Network indicated more than \$280,000 in extra Pell Grant funds were dispensed to Sarasota students.

The T4T Leadership Funders Council includes the Sarasota Chamber, the Gulf Coast Foundation, Barancik Foundation, United Way Suncoast, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and CareerEdge.