



Single mothers awarded scholarships by General Woman's Club of Lehigh

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By MEL TOADVINE (mtoadvine@breezenewspapers.com) , Lehigh Acres Citizen

Handing out scholarships to local students has been one of the main events each spring for several years now by the General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres and this year was no exception.

The club handed out \$3,500 in scholarship money to seven adult students who are attending college and also raising children on their own.

Three of the seven were presented \$500 scholarships on Friday and were honored by more than 50 members of the club at their annual gala at the Faith Lutheran Church. Four were unable to attend.



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The three women awarded scholarships. They are from left to right, Jennifer Kessler, Bertha Barco, and Alice Burns.

The club actually has 80 active members, but close to 30 of them have returned to their homes up north, but they and the Lehigh residents were all instrumental in raising the funds for this very special project.

The recipients this year are SandraLee Allen, Tanya McKnight, Bertha Baco, Tonja Stairs, Sonya Mikolajski, Jennifer Kessler and Alice Burns.

Present at the ceremony were Bertha Barco, Jennifer Kessler and Alice Burns. The others wanted to be there but were unable to attend.

Diane Lashua, chairman of the scholarship committee for this year said all were well deserving students and she and the committee wished them well. Each of the women were called to the front for the presentation.

Helping Lashua on the committee to select the students were Carol Neary, Getty Mitchell and Thelma Medley.

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres has given out scholarships for more than 30 years to the tune of more than \$75,000 to Lehigh Acres residents. Prior to 2009, scholarships were awarded to high school graduates. At that time four to five scholarships were given out each year with some years as much as \$1,000, Lashua said.

Then in 2009, the decision was made to grant scholarships to a single parent that was working on their college education and also had minor children living at home.

The presentation of scholarships each year is one of the popular events of the year.

The club has several fundraisers to bring about the funding of the scholarships to show their support for single moms and dads who are going back to school to make a better life for their children, Lashua said.

The largest fundraiser has been the Fashion Show held each spring and draws more than 160 local residents.

The people attending are able to enjoy checking out the latest fashions as well as enjoying a great lunch with raffles, going on throughout the event, Lashua said.

The club also has an annual card party, a silent auction, a book sale and several other events throughout the year to raise money not only for the scholarship awards, but also to donate money to the local charities in Lehigh.

"All the money raised stays in Lehigh Acres," Lashua said.

The club collects soda tabs for the Ronald McDonald House and they collect manufacturer's coupons for the veterans; they collect canned goods during the holidays and hand out food to the Community Services in Lehigh Acres. Members also collect eye glasses for the Lion's Club and they donate to Hope Hospice and Lehigh Community Services as they did this year.

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres is one of the oldest still active organizations in the community. It began in January of 1961 and was incorporated in 1963.

"We as a club have given 50 years of service to the community and are still very active. The theme for the club is 'working and serving together.'" Lashua said.

Financial gifts were also handed out to Lehigh Community Services Executive Director Charlotte Ray Nicely and to John Strickling, community relations director of Hope HealthCare Services.

Of the seven women who received financial aid this year:

Sandrilee Allen has two children and is pursuing a bachelor of science degree at Nova Southeastern University in the nursing program and will graduate in May of 2014, hoping to become a registered nurse.

Tanya McKnight has two children and is attending Nova Southeastern University and has worked in the health care field for more than 20 years as a medical biller and coder. She is in the entry level nursing program and would like to become a registered nurse and then go on and work for her master's program to become a nurse practitioner.

Bertha Barco has four children and is also attending Nova Southeastern University. She has worked at Lee Memorial Hospital for 12 years and is working toward her bachelor's degree in nursing. She said she would like to become a nurse as well as a good role model for her children.

Tonya Stairs has two children and is attending Edison State College. She will graduate in July of 2014 and her goal is to become a respiratory therapist. She said she would like to show her children that no matter what happens in life, that you can still get through it and make something of yourself.

Sonya Mikolajski has four children and is attending FGCU. She will receive a degree in psychology this year. She will have one year of pre-requisites to complete and then she will apply for the occupational therapy program. She also received a scholarship from the Woman's Club in 2012.

Jennifer Kessler has one child and is attending Hodges University locally. She is in the health science program and plans to apply for the nursing program at Nova Southeastern University for her final two years. Her goal is to become a registered nurse and specialize in pediatrics and or obstetrics.

Alice Burns has one child and is attending Keiser University. She is working toward her associate's degree in the medical assisting and ultra-sound program. She is currently working part-time doing medical billing for an anesthesiologist.