

Scholarships help first-generation students attend UNF

By Sara Kaufman
Staff Writer

It looks like another stuffy reception—business suits, buffet line, printed speech scripts and agendas—as students, teachers and community members mingle in a large conference room on the campus at the University of North Florida.

Fortunately, for this group, the initial assessment proves wrong, and nothing but hearty, warm and fuzzy feelings are around.

This particular reception was to acknowledge the handful of UNF students who were awarded First Generation Scholarships, including five who hail from Ponte Vedra Beach.

"This year we had 100 state-matched donations," said Sharon Aston, assistant vice president of public relations. "This is [important because it's a] change of culture in some families."

Based a Florida Statute (1009.701), the First Generation Matching Grant Program is a need-based program that is open to students who demonstrate financial need, are enrolled in a participating college and whose parents have not earned baccalaureate or higher degrees.

Funds from the state are determined by contributions from private donors. The state matches all the contributions on a one-to-one dollar basis.

UNF awarded more than 300 students First Generation scholarships in 2007-2008. This year, five Ponte Vedra students were awarded scholarships. Britney Richmond, Danielle Pank, Kushtrim Gruda, Leslie Rios and Justin Goff are all first-generation college students who received between \$2,000 and \$5,000.

"I'm happy to have been offered this money," said Leslie Rios, senior

education major and Ponte Vedra resident. "It makes it easier to live comfortably as a full-time student and working full-time."

According to John Delaney, president of the university, since the program's inception, more than 600 students have benefited at UNF from the FGMG scholarships and more than 500 different people have donated to the program.

Rios' parents hail from Puerto Rico and, while she was raised in Jacksonville Beach, she now lives



UNF junior Erika Alexander, a first-generation scholarship recipient from Ponte Vedra Beach.

in Ponte Vedra for its proximity to the both the ocean and the school.

"The First Generation Scholarship program is a tremendous idea," said Delaney. "The importance of education is what attracted all of these donors to this program."

Carol Thompson, Ponte Vedra Beach resident, UNF alumna and member of its the board of trustees, said she was attracted to the program because of her history as a recipient of scholarship money.

"I understand how important [scholarships] are," said Thompson. "[My husband and I] both share a belief that access to a quality education is one of the most important ingredients to success."

Scholarship recipient Erika Alexander agreed, and expressed how



PHOTOS BY SARA KAUFMAN
UNF senior and Ponte Vedra resident Leslie Rios is thankful for first-generation scholarship support.

thankful these students are to have the monetary help them pursue their goals.

"It's a blessing to have the ability to achieve my goals and then be able to

at the reception.

"Kindness will take you where money won't," he said.

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TV film recreating 1933 river trip to air Sunday

In *Marjorie's Wake*, a documentary film retracing the journey of Pulitzer Prize-winner Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings on the St. Johns River, is schedule to air on WJCT-TV on Sunday, April 13, at 6 p.m. (analog) and Monday, April 14, at 9:00 p.m. (digital).

This one-hour film, produced by an Orlando-based company, celebrates "sense of place" and examines the many ways in which the St. Johns River has shaped Florida's culture over time.

In 1933, Rawlings, along with her Cracker neighbor Dessie Smith, embarked on a 10-day adventure on the St. Johns River, chronicled in the "Hyacinth Drift" chapter of Rawlings' book *Cross Creek*.

In *Marjorie's Wake* retraces this route with Florida native Leslie Poole and Jacksonville resident Jennifer Chase.

Poole is a writer, professor of environmental studies at Rollins College and PhD student in environ-



PHOTO BY EQUINOX DOCUMENTARIES

Leslie Poole and Jennifer Chase prepare to start their journey retracing the 1933 trip that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Dessie Smith took down the St. Johns River. A documentary of the trip, *In Marjorie's Wake*, airs on WJCT-TV on Sunday, April 13.

mental history at the University of Florida. Chase is a musician, playwright and educator with Florida Community College.

Poole and Chase shadowed the route taken by Rawlings and Smith from south of Puzzle Lake, north on the St. Johns to the Ocklawaha River and back to the original Rawlings home, now preserved as a State Historic Park at Cross Creek.

The film has been released first to PBS affiliates in Florida. A national release is planned for the near future.

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