

Promise Scholars paving way for a college education

By Suzanne Sproul

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Promise Scholars is helping to make dreams come true.

The nonprofit is a partnership among the Ontario/Montclair School District, Chaffey Joint Union High School District, Chaffey College, Cal State San Bernardino, Cal Poly Pomona, Citrus College, Crafton Hills College, San Bernardino Valley College, UC Riverside, the University of La Verne and the University of Redlands.

It is designed to provide college access to dedicated students who successfully complete their OMSD and CJUHSD educations and then graduate to one of the partner higher education institutions. It is based on the award-winning Online to College program, which is an early college awareness/access program operating at four OMSD elementary schools.

The program introduces the students to their potentials and possibilities in fifth grade. After that, they are invited to participate in field trips, college fairs and other projects all with two goals in mind -- working hard and staying in school will pay off.

And it's also very much a community relationship. Local educators, elected officials, businesses and people who believe in believing have all gotten on board to let families and students know that higher education is possible. All supporting partners are committed for the long haul because they know an educated populace means a prosperous community.

The Ontario/Montclair School Foundation recently hosted a lovely reception to provide supporters with updates on the program's successes and to recognize loyal donors and partners. The event, which also served as a scholarship fundraiser, was held in the foyer of HMC Architects in Ontario.

Those honored for their continued support included Image 2000; the Ontario/Montclair School Employees Federal Credit Union; Soroptimists International Montclair/Inland Valley; HMC Architects; Southern California Gas Co.; Chaffey College; Crafton Hills College; Allstar Kia of Pomona/San Bernardino; Inland Valley United Way and Cardenas Markets.

Leslie Sorensen is an OMSD resource development administer who was instrumental in getting the program started years ago. She also is a Soroptimists Montclair/Inland Valley member and one of the program's biggest fans.

"The big idea is to provide a place for every child in college or some post-secondary program. We want them to believe it is possible and we show them that all these adults will be with you every step of the way," Sorensen said.

Another believer in the program is Marco Robles, Cardenas Markets spokesman.

"We believe in giving back to the community and we accept the enormous responsibility of businesses like ours to help where we can," Robles said.

He said Cardenas Markets knows that supplying healthy food to the community helps with keeping the community in good shape, but it also recognizes the importance of education.

He said the company is proud to be a part of the educational pipeline.

“We are committed to supporting efforts to open doors for children,” said Robles. The company opened its first store in Ontario and its corporate headquarters remain there.

“We want to not only plant the seed but we want to nourish the idea of the importance of an education,” he said.

Mat Holton is the Chaffey Joint Union High School District superintendent. He said Promise Scholars is an incredible partnership of caring people, businesses and institutions. “The way to change a community positively is to increase educational possibilities and Promise Scholars does that,” he said.

Foundation board members are Joy Parker president; Madeline Stewart, vice president; Anna Juarez, treasurer; Jose Marquez, secretary; Robert Cruz; Edward Starr; Tim Ward; Leslie Sorensen; and Karla Wells.

“The Foundation’s purpose is to raise money and to promote programs. We want to expose all of our students to the possibilities that are ahead of them and we want them to experience it early,” said Joy Parker, Foundation president and a former school principal.

And that begins in the fifth grade when students can visit a college campus and start picturing themselves there later. “This opens up a whole new world to them, especially when they believe this can actually happen.”

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