



LAKELAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LFD is Proud to Announce its Fire-Service Opportunity and Career for Underprivileged Students Scholarship Program (F.O.C.U.S.)

The department is excited to announce that it has developed and implemented a scholarship program to assist homeless Polk County seniors in high school and recent graduates. The program is intended to and designed to provide the opportunity at a successful adult life through a career in the fire service. The fire service has provided many firefighters with a successful career and enriching experiences. It is the hope that through this program the same can be afforded to a deserving young person.

The scholarship program was born from the department's desire to help those in need in its community while at the same time addressing desires to develop a workforce that is more representative of its community. In its inaugural year, several compelling applicants came to the selection committee's attention, and two candidates were selected: Ariel Brant (18, Female) and Owen Forbes Nieves (19, Male), both Polk County School's graduates who begin classes on August 21, 2014 thanks to the scholarship.

LFD became affiliated with Polk County Public Schools' Homeless Education Advocates Restoring the Hope (HEARTH) project approximately two years ago. The HEARTH project is a special division within the school system to provide support for students that meet the school boards' definition of homelessness.

The program is not a guarantee for employment. Although they are encouraged to apply with LFD upon their successful completion of fire standards and meeting all necessary requirements, they are in no way guaranteed employment and must be hired on their own merit. No guarantees are made in regards to their passing or failing of the course. Mentorships will be provided to the students by LFD firefighters to help contribute to their success, although responsibility of succeeding is entirely on the selected candidates.

This opportunity is possible through partnerships with other public service and educational organizations in Polk County. The opportunity was offered to all Polk County students that meet the school boards' definition of homelessness. For detailed information on the application process, the scholarship, and expectations please visit <http://goo.gl/LUm3uT>.

For additional information or to interview students and/or LFD personnel responsible in organizing this effort, please contact PIO/PEO Janel Vasallo.

- END -

Gary Ballard, Fire Chief

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