Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits announces $150 million commitment to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program

BY PAUL SOOST

Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits (Southern Glazer’s), the largest North American wine and spirits distribution company, announced April 6 it has committed $150 million to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program for the 2017-18 school year, once again topping its own historical donations of the past few years.

Southern Glazer’s CEO Wayne Chaplin announced the extraordinary pledge during a celebration honoring the company’s 2016-17 $125 million contribution, providing more than 20,000 scholarships.

Students from Monsignor Edward Pace High School participated in the event held at Florida International University’s Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. Of the 835 students at Pace High School, 376 benefit from the

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Step Up scholarship helps boost Ariely’s grades and confidence

BY GEOFF FOX

“Ariely Burgos’ voice cracked with emotion as she spoke about the academic progress of her oldest daughter, Ariely, a ninth-grader at the recently opened Cristo Rey Tampa High School. For years, Ariely has struggled with dyslexia, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and auditory processing disorder (APD), the last a condition that makes it hard for her to understand vocal tones or distinguish certain sounds. “Some people think she can’t hear, but she can,” Burgos said of Ariely, who is 15. “Her brain just doesn’t always process what she’s hearing. Some sounds and words sound similar, so she can’t always catch if someone is being sarcastic or joking. It directly influences her reading fluency and that causes issues in school.”

Watching Ariely struggle through their neighborhood school tore at her mother’s heart. Imagine trying to learn how to read when some of the letters don’t look right and the words sound wrong. 

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When executives from The Doctors Company, the nation’s largest physician-owned medical malpractice insurer, consider why partnering with Step Up For Students makes sense, the answer is simple: Denisha Merriweather. The former Step Up scholar was recently recognized by President Donald J. Trump. “We are pleased to hear about the student success stories made possible by this scholarship program and what doors it opens for their futures,” said Doug Boltz, the company’s assistant vice president of taxation and cash management. “During President Donald Trump’s first address before a joint session of Congress, he singled out Denisha Merriweather, a Step Up For Students scholarship recipient. Denisha was the first in her [immediate] family to graduate high school and college. Later this year, she is receiving her master’s degree in social work. Successful stories like Denisha’s reinforce why giving back to the community is important.”

The Doctors Company first partnered with Step Up in 2010 and has since contributed more than $8.1 million, funding 1,165 scholarships, and has renewed its commitment for 2017 with a pledge of $2 million. “The Doctors Company values our long-term partnership with Step Up For Students,” Boltz said. “We look forward to the continuing success of the scholarship program and the opportunities it provides to children.”

Headquartered in Napa, California, The Doctors Company boasts approximately 620 employees nationwide. The Doctors Company was founded and is led by doctors and has unique insight into physicians and medical practices, understanding the complexities of practicing medicine today. By sharing expertise and vast resources with its members, The Doctors Company helps doctors focus on what they do best: delivering care. While The Doctors Company is committed to patient safety, access to care and advancing the practice of good medicine, it is also committed to giving back to the communities it serves, “because it is the right thing to do,” said Brian Dodd, The Doctors Company community relations coordinator.

“Our employee gift matching program doubles the financial support to nonprofits favored by our employees, while the corporate charitable program supports directly the communities in which we do business,” he said. “Additionally, The Doctors Company Foundation supports patient safety education for healthcare professionals through a competitive grant process.”

And because of that philanthropical mindset, and Step Up’s mission to provide lower-income K-12 schoolchildren in Florida educational options beyond their neighborhood schools, the Florida-based nonprofit that helps run the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program is a logical partner. “The Doctors Company believes in giving back to the community that serves us,” Boltz said. “We have the opportunity to self-direct tax credits to people in need. By partnering with Step Up For Students, we are able to contribute to the educational scholarships for disadvantaged children and see brighter futures unfold.”

This is precisely why Step Up For Students exists, said Step Up President Doug Tuthill. “At Step Up we believe every child – no matter what the family’s income limitations – deserves a chance to succeed,” Tuthill said. “While our company is built on that desire and belief, we would be nothing without our donors like The Doctors Company. On behalf of Florida’s most disadvantaged schoolchildren, we are immensely grateful for our remarkable donors.”

Companies: Claim your tax credit

If your company has enrolled in the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program this year and has not yet notified us, please let us know so that we can extend our gratitude to you and assist your company with taking the necessary steps to receive your tax credits, including the required Certificate of Contribution for your tax returns. If your company has not yet notified us of your pledge, please do so by emailing Tim Bodamer at tbodamer@sufs.org.

DONOR BRIEFS

During Step Up’s Rising Stars Awards ceremony in St. Petersburg, Wright Flood presented Step Up For Students a check for $1 million to go toward scholarships for the 2016-17 school year. Students who were recognized during the ceremony for excellence thanked the company’s representatives for their generosity.

Wright Flood donates $1 million to Step Up For Students scholars

Wright Flood, the largest provider of federal flood insurance policies in the U.S., recently announced its largest contribution to date to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. Wright Flood’s $1 million contribution will provide 164 scholarships to financially disadvantaged Florida schoolchildren.

The contribution was announced during the Step Up For Students Rising Stars Awards celebration in Pinellas County. The event, hosted at St. Petersburg Catholic High School, recognized Step Up scholars, parents and teachers for their exceptional work during the 2016-17 school year. Students were able to thank Wright Flood executives and other donors attending the event.

Wright Flood has partnered with Step Up For Students since 2008, contributing $2,850,000, which has provided a total of 516 scholarships. “Wright Flood is proud to donate annually to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program and is impressed with the success of the students who participate,” said president of Wright Flood. “As a St. Petersburg company, we are so glad to see students in our home state benefit.”

PNC donates $2 million to Step Up to provide 329 scholarships for local students

The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. (NYSE: PNC), one of the largest diversified financial services institutions in the U.S., announced recently a $2 million donation to the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program through Step Up For Students for 329 financially disadvantaged children in Palm Beach County.

The $2 million donation will be used for scholarships during the 2016-17 school year.
For two weeks in February, Step Up For Students shined the spotlight on scholars, parents and educators who this school year have gone above and beyond while participating in at least one of two scholarship programs for schoolchildren in Florida.

The Rising Stars Awards ceremony was held at nine different locations across the state, recognizing those outstanding individuals involved with either Step Up’s Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program for lower-income students, or the state-funded Gardiner Program for children with certain special needs. This year, Step Up received more than 650 nominations for the Rising Stars Awards.

Teachers, students and scholars’ family members were nominated by teachers and school administrators for exceptional work throughout the school year at their respective Step Up partner schools.

This year, nearly 98,000 K-12 students are using the tax-credit scholarship statewide for tuition assistance at the private school of their choice, or on a transportation scholarship to offset the cost to an out-of-district public school. Another nearly 8,000 more scholars, ages 3 to 22, use the Gardiner Scholarship to customize their education by attending participating schools or by using approved therapists, specialists, curriculum, technology – even a college savings account.

“We are so proud of our scholars and those who help them realize their dreams and academic success,” Step Up President Doug Tuthill said before the event. “It’s important to recognize all of those who make this program a success, and that includes the teachers who educate these kids, the parents who wanted more for their children, the kids who work hard toward their futures, and of course, our generous donors, which without them we would not exist.”

Corporate donors who help fund the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program attended each of the Rising Stars Awards events and were also recognized for their support, and had a chance to meet the families they help through their donations. In 2016, the corporate community contributed a total of $52 million to Step Up For Students for these scholarships.
“Sometimes, I’ll read words that aren’t even on the page and I’ll mix up sentences or skip sentences,” Ariely said.

Due to her challenges, Ariely often speaks in a soft voice and isn’t one to initiate conversation, but her smile can light up a room.

Burgos wanted to enroll her in a private Catholic school, where she could receive more attention in a Christian setting, but she and husband Jose Burgos couldn’t afford it.

Fortunately, as Ariely was about to enter third grade, her mother learned of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship managed by Step Up For Students. The family applied and Ariely was accepted. She enrolled at Tampa’s St. Joseph Catholic School for three years before transferring to Morning Star School, a private school that serves students with learning disabilities.

At Morning Star, Burgos said, the teachers worked “miracles” with Ariely.

“Step Up was great because we could get her in a school for learning disabilities,” Burgos said. “When she started sixth grade at Morning Star, she was reading on a third-grade level. She is now reading on a high seventh-grade or low eighth-grade level. She still has difficulty, but she’s acquired a lot of different skills.”

Ariely said she enjoyed St. Joseph and Morning Star because of more individualized instruction, especially with reading.

“The teachers were really fun and that makes it easier to learn,” Ariely said. “They bring joy into the classroom. They were always cheerful and always caring.”

Morning Star Principal Eileen Odom said that while Ariely was struggling in a few subjects when she entered the school in sixth grade, she was obviously “very bright and spiritual.” Despite Ariely’s reading struggles, Odom said she excelled at math.

“I think she just needed an environment that was more student-centered,” Odom said. “She’s initially kind of shy and quiet. If I would get her to read something, she would talk in a real quiet voice, but if you provide her with some successful experiences, she can rise to the occasion. We helped her realize she had strengths and could succeed. We spent the next three years trying to boost her up and give her confidence.”

It worked.

Ariely was eventually comfortable enough at the school to run for student council, star in Christmas plays, assist as an altar server and help with fundraising.

When it was time for Ariely to enter high school, Burgos didn’t hesitate to choose Cristo Rey, which opened in August 2016. She said the school’s Corporate Work Study Program was particularly appealing.

Through that program, Ariely now works at Step Up’s Clearwater office several times a month. There she helps with paperwork and other duties, has written a story about herself for Step Up’s blog, and helped create a video describing her school’s relationship with Step Up, which will be shown to the nonprofit’s board of directors.

This is the first time that PNC has partnered with Step Up For Students, which is funded by corporations through tax-credited donations. PNC’s contribution will fund K-12 scholarships, so lower-income children can attend the school that best meets their learning needs.

The donation was announced by Cressman Bronson, PNC’s regional president of Florida East, on Wednesday while Atlantic Christian Academy’s 11th and 12th grade Advanced Placement economics class visited the bank’s local West Palm Beach offices. During their time at PNC, the students learned about monitoring credit scores and applying for school and car loans, as well as learning about the different lines of business that keep the engine of the bank humming smoothly.

“Our support of Step Up For Students is a strategic investment in the future of Palm Beach County children,” said Bronson. “By easing the financial burden for parents with this tax donation, we’re supporting a solid foundation for the growth and success of our local children, their families and ultimately, our Florida economy.”