

A Gift That Keeps Giving

//BY CAROL STINNETT



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In high school, Daniel Salas already had college on his mind. He took advanced placement classes, focused on his studies and thought about potential careers. When senior year came, he attended college tours—asking questions about programs, exploring activities and taking in the campus atmosphere. "My parents always supported my goals and said that college was the path to make my dreams come true," he says.

Several schools checked off what Daniel was looking for, but they lacked the intimate environment he was in search of. "Coming from a small school, I was overwhelmed," he recalls. "I enjoyed smaller class sizes in high school—I was close with my teachers, and that was important in choosing a college."

After attending a presentation by Nelson Sepulveda, assistant director of Student Development at Valencia College, Daniel began looking more into Valencia, realizing it was the right fit for him.

Valencia's Bridges to Success Achievers Scholarship helped with tuition costs. He explained, "I never had a college fund growing up. I was very fortunate to receive a scholarship... every hour

I didn't have to work to pay for school was another hour I could devote to studying." He also became involved in student groups, including Student Government Association and Valencia Volunteers.

In spring semester 2014, Dr. Melissa Pedone, Valencia's dean of math at Osceola Campus, visited Daniel's Chemistry II class to talk about the Johnson Scholarship. The scholarship is available for students at Valencia's Osceola Campus who plan to receive a bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences from UCF. The award amount progressively increases each semester as students demonstrate academic success.

Since Daniel had plans to transfer to UCF's Biomedical Sciences program through Valencia's DirectConnect to UCF, he decided to apply. It was the final binding agent to help him take the next step, Daniel explains, and he later learned that he was named a Johnson Scholarship recipient. "I was in shock. All I could think of was how blessed I was."

At UCF, the Johnson Scholarship helped Daniel in more ways than just financial assistance. The scholarship program provided him with an advisor to guide him along his college journey. In addition, he had the opportunity to write letters to scholarship donors. "It really hit home to me," he says. "Writing letters was humbling and allowed me to think about what the Johnson Scholarship provided me. There is no stronger motivation than knowing someone believes in you. My parents are my rock, my main support system. And having donors fund scholarships for recipients like me—those served as my motivation."

This past spring, Daniel earned his B.S. degree in Biomedical Sciences from UCF and proudly wore his Johnson Scholar medal at graduation. Today, he serves as a program advisor for Student Development at Valencia's Osceola Campus. He plans to earn a master's degree in Sports and Exercise Physiology, and then move on to a Doctor of Physical Therapy program. He hopes to become a physical therapist, helping people become not only physically healthy, but also holistically well.

He sees every day as an opportunity to impact on someone's life. "Personally, I believe that scholarships are more than giving away money," he explains. "They impact the lives of students by allowing them to focus more on studies so that one day, they can give back to those who believed in them."

Daniel with Valencia student leaders during a summer team builder at Tree Trek Adventure Park.





***Celebrating fifty years
of better tomorrows.***

For milestone birthdays, most people like to extend the celebration and enjoy their big day for a week or a month. But at Valencia College, we've celebrated our 50th anniversary for an entire year!

And what a year it has been.

We've reflected on our early days, as the college's founders struggled to create a college that was open to everyone from any race or religion. We've celebrated by lifting our voices in song. We've planted trees on every campus to ensure that our campuses remain beautiful and healthy for years to come.

Here are some more highlights from the past year.

- 1 Osceola Campus students were pumped up about the 50th-themed Spirit Day, which included bungee jumping, a zip-line and the chance to spin on a human-powered gyroscope.
- 2 Rula Khalaf, Valencia's Distinguished Graduate for 2016-17, gives the commencement address on May 7, 2017—50 years from the college's inception.
- 3 Longtime Valencia benefactor Barbara Roper raises a glass to Valencia's 50th birthday at the Foundation's annual Taste for Learning fundraiser.
- 4 Winter Park Campus honors the college's 50th birthday with horticultural flair.
- 5 Students and alumni joined Valencia president Sandy Shugart onstage at the 50th Anniversary Concert in April for the grand finale, a medley of "All You Need is Love" by the Beatles and "Gimme Some Lovin'" by the Spencer Davis Group.
- 6 The West Campus grounds crew chips in to help plant trees during the "50 Years, 50 Trees" kickoff event on Earth Day 2017.
- 7 The Lake Nona Campus team held a joint birthday celebration, honoring the campus's 5th birthday and the college's 50th.
- 8 Minniejean Brown-Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Little Rock's public schools, speaks to a crowd at West Campus.

