

Valencia awarding \$500 to first 500 students who enroll at Poinciana campus

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Remember when Oprah Winfrey used to give away cars to audience members on her talk show?

“You get a car! And you get a car! And you...”

In similar Santa Claus fashion, Valencia College is giving away \$500 scholarships to the first 500 students who enroll at the college’s new campus in Poinciana.

Jovan Fernandez-Mestre, a senior at Poinciana High School, was the first official recipient.



Jovan Fernandez-Mestre, center, a senior at Poinciana High School, was the first official recipient of \$500 from Valencia College after enrolling in the Poinciana campus.

He got an oversized check from Valencia at a ceremony in April when college officials announced the scholarship was available to all the students.

Located at the intersection of Pleasant Hill and Reaves roads, the new 19-acre campus – built on land donated by Osceola County – opens in August after more than a decade of planning among local, state and college officials.

The campus will serve residents of Poinciana. With a growing population, Poinciana has boomed since the first houses were built there in the 1970s. Liberty and Poinciana high schools will be natural feeders for the campus, which is projected to serve some 1,500 degree-seeking students and another 1,000 students seeking specialized job training. Osceola County Commissioner Brandon Arrington and Kathleen Plinske, president of Valencia's Poinciana, Osceola and Lake Nona campuses, say the campus will open doors to students who are hungry for higher education but hamstrung by transportation. Valencia's Osceola campus takes up to 45 minutes to reach by car and more than two hours to reach by bus, each way. Officials have said Poinciana students have been far less likely to attend college than their peers in Central Florida because of the distance.

“Imagine how different the future will be when students from Poinciana only have to spend 15 minutes on the bus, instead of five hours,” Plinske has said. Imagine how many more of our students will be able to pursue a college education when a campus is in their backyard.”

The main building will house 12 classrooms, a teaching kitchen, science lab, two computer labs, library, tutoring center, indoor/outdoor café and multipurpose room. General associate of arts degrees will be offered, which can be transferred to any state university. A number of associate of science degrees will be offered in business administration, office administration, culinary and hospitality management, information technology and criminal justice. Jennifer Robertson, the campus' executive dean, said classes needed for most degree programs will be “bundled” together to help student better schedule school and work. Certificate and non-degree training programs will include medical coding, welding and construction, among others. Valencia's new campus is among several infrastructure projects transforming Poinciana, including the \$150 million

Poinciana Parkway that opened in 2016 and a major expansion of Poinciana Medical Center in 2015. Go to valenciacollege.edu/poinciana for more information. Students and parents are also invited to attend two upcoming “application” days at the new Poinciana campus on May 15 and May 18, both at 5:30 p.m.