

Valencia College Celebrates New Campus in Poinciana at Official Dedication Ceremony

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Kissimmee, FL – Valencia College officials and students, along with an array of Osceola County officials and community members, celebrated the opening of the college’s Poinciana Campus today.

The campus, which opened for classes on Aug. 28, was slated to hold a formal dedication ceremony in September, but the event was postponed because of Hurricane Irma.

The campus, which college officials fast-tracked to meet the need in Poinciana, now has 1,119 students enrolled in classes – 55 percent of whom are Hispanic and 19 percent who are African-American. One third of those students are the first members of their families to attend college.

Valencia College’s president, Dr. Sandy Shugart, describes the campus in Poinciana as “a game-changer” for the community.

“We are delighted that we now have the opportunity to provide increased access to higher education to the residents of Poinciana and believe that this new campus will dramatically increase the community’s college-going rate,” Shugart said. “We hope that this, in turn, will help transform the community serving as a driver of economic development and innovation.”

The \$27 million campus features state-of-the-art facilities, including 12 classrooms, a science lab, two computer labs, a teaching kitchen for the culinary program, a library and a tutoring center.

In addition to degree programs, the campus offers job-training courses and language classes. The Poinciana Campus also offers continuing education courses in English as a Second Language (ESOL), Spanish, plus electronic board assembly and private security guard training. Upcoming courses include: construction, medical assisting, warehouse packaging and transportation logistics.

The Poinciana campus is Valencia’s sixth campus.

Poinciana is one of the fastest-growing communities in Central Florida. Census figures show that the area’s population grew from 13,600 residents to more than 53,000 from 2000 to 2010. One-half of the residents are Hispanic, according to U.S. Census data.

The median family income in Poinciana is below the state average and national average. In 2015, the mean household income in Poinciana was \$50,786, while in

Orlando, the mean household income was \$63,000. The median household income in Florida was \$70,000.

To address the economic and educational gaps, Valencia launched a Got College? Initiative in 2010 with one goal – to increase college-going rates among Osceola County high school graduates. In 2010, Osceola’s college-going rate was ranked 61st out of 67 counties in the state. By 2015, Osceola had moved up to 27th in the state.

The Got College? results have been especially impressive at Poinciana High School, where in 2010 only 26 percent of the graduates went on to attend a state college or university. By 2015, 47.5 percent of the school’s graduating seniors went on to a state college or university.

“Our high schools in Poinciana currently have among the lowest college-going rates in the county — but not because of a lack of talent or a lack of desire or a lack of preparation, but simply because of a lack of access,” said Kathleen Plinske, president of Valencia’s Osceola, Lake Nona and Poinciana campuses — and the leader of the Got College? initiative.

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