



News Release

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\$10,000 in SWIF, CHS donations to support Ridgewater students in critical need

WILLMAR and HUTCHINSON, MN – College students experience a wide variety of challenges. From balancing time and money, to cancelled day care and vehicle troubles, it has never been easy to be a college student. The pandemic hasn't made things any easier, and has caused loss of jobs and related challenges.

To help students with these difficulties, the Ridgewater College Foundation created the Ridgewater Cares Emergency Fund (RCEF) about a year ago. The fund is designed to help students with emergency needs that may have otherwise caused them to leave school. As needs have intensified during the pandemic, so has community support for educational goals. Recently, the Ridgewater Foundation received a \$5,000 donation from both the Southwest Initiative Foundation to support the RCEF effort and a \$5,000 donation from the CHS Foundation, an organization tied to the CHS diversified global agribusiness cooperative, to support Ridgewater agriculture students in times of need.

“The Ridgewater Cares Emergency Fund assists students who are undergoing extreme financial difficulties so they can continue their education at Ridgewater College,” explained Ashley Gabbert, Ridgewater Foundation director of annual giving and alumni relations. “If not resolved quickly, financial difficulties can hinder the students’ abilities to attend class, be successful, or remain enrolled.”

During the 2019-2020 school year, the RCEF assisted eight students. Situations varied from car repairs, gas money, rent and more. While the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding assisted many students during this much larger, short-term time of need, the RCEF will remain an essential resource for students experiencing hardships.

Recently, a Ridgewater student was in a difficult situation but wasn't eligible for the federal CARES pandemic relief funding. The local RCEF, however, was able to assist, which allowed the student to remain in school. The \$5,000 SWIF grant will help maintain the RCEF to support students in need. The \$5,000 CHS Foundation donation will specifically assist agriculture students to align with the mission of CHS.

The CHS Foundation contributed that same amount to all its college and university partners. “It is important to us to continue to show our support of and commitment to students so they can stay engaged, be successful and continue their career paths in agriculture,” said Nanci Lilja, CHS Foundation president.

“For several students, this has been a make-or-break situation,” Gabbert explained. “They could either focus on the financial situation in front of them or they could keep showing up to class. We are so grateful to have donors who support these students so they can keep pursuing success in education.”

Accessing Funds

To apply for funding, an eligible student in good academic standing must first meet with a college counselor. If RCEF support is deemed appropriate and is available, and no other community or campus resources are available, payment is most often made to the third party involved (i.e. auto repair shop) for the exact amount necessary to alleviate the situation (not to exceed a set cap). RCEF is a last resort.

Supporting the Ridgewater College Foundation

Anyone interested in providing additional support to the Ridgewater Cares Emergency Fund can give online at www.ridgewater.edu/givenow or send checks to the Ridgewater Foundation at 2101 15th Ave NW, Willmar, MN 56201. For more information, contact Ashley Gabbert at 320-222-6098 or ashley.gabbert@ridgewater.edu. Gifts to the Foundation may be tax deductible to the extent of current law.

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Ridgewater College is a community and technical college with campuses in the central Minnesota communities of Willmar and Hutchinson. The college serves more than 5,000 students through its nearly 100 academic programs and more than 68,000 training hours for individuals and businesses through customized training and continuing education. The college is a member of Minnesota State and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Minnesota State includes 30 community and technical colleges and 7 state universities serving approximately 400,000 students. It is the fourth-largest system of two-year colleges and four-year universities in the United States.

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