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July 22, 2008

Scholarships aimed to attract nurses

By Markeshia Ricks

There are few places in the country where the shortage of nurses is being felt more acutely than in Alabama's nursing homes, where licensed practical nurses, or LPNs, play a large role in providing health care.

The Alabama Nursing Home Association Education Foundation announced Monday that it is trying to change that by providing 44 scholarships to rising LPN students to ensure that more nurses always will be in the pipeline for the long-term care industry in the state.

"Nursing homes in Alabama are the largest employers of LPNs in the state," said Sandra Sims-deGraffenried, associate director of the Alabama Nursing Home Association. "There is a tremendous nursing shortage in Alabama and nationally, and we want to do anything we can to help."

Starting this fall, LPN students with at least a semester of training at one of the state community colleges and a 2.5 GPA could be eligible for a \$1,000 annual scholarship. The foundation will provide 44 scholarships at the 22 community colleges that offer LPN training throughout the state.

Postsecondary Chancellor Bradley Byrne said an industry providing scholarships for their future employees exemplifies the relationship that the community college system should have with business.

"We have to be creative, and we'll need to work really closely with the business community in the future to do what we can to prepare our work force," he said.

Marilyn Pittman, a graduate of the LPN program at H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College, said a scholarship would have made a difference for her.

An LPN who works at Capitol Hill Health and Rehabilitation Center in Montgomery, Pittman worked two jobs while going to school.

"A lot of people can't afford to stop working and go to school," she said. "A scholarship would have been a big help with non-school expenses because the scholarship money would take care of your school expenses."

Trena Means, a fellow Trenholm Tech graduate and Capitol Hill LPN, said many people often fail to continue their education because they can't afford to finish.

"Money is the main reason that some people don't go to school," she said. "Any little bit would help."

Sims-deGraffenried said students pursuing the LPN degree often have to balance their practical needs -- clothes, gas, and a baby sitter -- against their education. In many cases, the practical needs trump finishing their education.

Allison Terry, director of the Alabama Center for Nursing, said Alabamians who complete their LPN training are overwhelmingly satisfied with their work.

LPNs typically complete a practical nursing program and are licensed by the state to provide patient care under the supervision of a registered nurse or a physician. Alabama has nearly 16,000 LPNs, according to the Alabama Board of Nursing.

According to a survey of the LPN work force in the state, 94 percent of LPNs in the state are satisfied with their jobs.

"They don't make the salaries that (registered nurses) do, but they like what they do and they enjoy the patient population they work with," Terry said.
