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FIRM'S GIFT AIDS STUDENTS

Deerfield accepts share of donation

By Susannah Bryan

DEERFIELD BEACH- A firm in the business of prison security is donating \$100,000 so children from low-income families will have a chance to enroll in private schools.

Wackenhut Corrections Corp., now known as the Geo Group, is making the donation through the state's corporate income tax scholarship program with Deerfield Beach, Pembroke Pines, South Bay and Moorehaven each receiving \$25,000, company spokesman Pablo E. Paez said.

In return, the Boca Raton-based firm gets a dollar-for-dollar break on state taxes for contributing to scholarships for kindergartners through 12th-graders.

"Corporations are really thrilled about this program," said Denise Lasher, spokeswoman for Florida Pride, the Tampa-based scholarship funding organization administering the scholarship money donated by the Geo Group. "It enables them to direct a portion of their tax dollars for education and for helping underprivileged children."

Up to eight students in each of the four cities will benefit from the program, which pays \$3,500 in tuition for private school or \$500 in transportation costs for students who want to attend a public school outside their district.

John Hurley, senior vice president of North American operations for the Geo Group Inc., presented a door-sized check to

Florida Pride at a Dec. 16 meeting in private school of their choice. Deerfield Beach.

A similar check was presented to Pembroke Pines during the Dec. 3 commission meeting. Presentations are expected to be made in South Bay and Moorehaven in January.

"This will give our children the opportunity to expand their horizons," Audrey Rodriguez, principal of the Aukela Christian Military Academy in Pembroke Pines, told the City Commission.

Geo Group manages centers in each of the four cities, but the scholarships will be available to students throughout Broward, Palm Beach and Glades counties, Lasher said.

Geo Group operates the South Florida State Hospital in Pembroke Pines, the Broward County Work Release and Transitional Center in Deerfield Beach, and correctional facilities in South Bay in Palm Beach County and Moorehaven in Glades County.

About 800 children in Broward are receiving scholarships through the corporate tax credit program, Lasher said. About 50 companies are participating in the program, which went into effect Jan. 1, 2002.

"They can direct money to helping low-income families and contribute to an educated work force," Lasher said. "It has a two-fold purpose."

TO APPLY

Kindergartners through 12th-graders from low-income families in Broward County can apply for a \$3,500 scholarship to attend the private school of their choice.

To qualify, families must meet the eligibility requirements for the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program. Students do not have to be participating in the program;

they must only meet the income requirements.

Also, students who wish to attend a public school outside Broward can apply for a transportation scholarship up to \$500.

To be put on a waiting list, sign up at stepupforstudents.com or call Florida Pride in Tampa at 813-318-0995.

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