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Caring Campus Pasco-Hernando State College Provides Crucial Support to Students Amid Hurricanes

LONG BEACH, CA – Amid the turmoil of recent hurricanes, students at Pasco-Hernando State College (PHSC) in Florida discovered that their college was more than just a campus – it was a lifeline. For students like Dara Gibbs, Epifanio Colon, and Rachelle Wills, the college’s unwavering commitment to care and connection as a Caring Campus transformed a time of crisis into a moment of hope, providing not only emergency relief but the stability and support needed to move forward.

When Hurricane Helene struck, Gibbs faced severe flooding that damaged her home’s floors, walls, and furniture. Through PHSC’s relief efforts, she received financial assistance, food, and cleaning supplies.

“Receiving aid from my college made me feel very hopeful and happy about the future,” Gibbs said. “But even beyond the hurricane, Pasco-Hernando is incredibly supportive. They’ve helped me with free diapers, food for my family, and a childcare grant, so I don’t have to worry about daycare costs while I’m in school. Anything I need, they’re always there for me.”

Colon, a freshman studying to become a paramedic, faced weeks without power when a lightning strike hit his apartment during the storm. Colon received a personal phone call from the college asking what aid he needed and within days, Colon and his wife received food, toiletries, towels, washcloths, and soap.

“I was ecstatic at the level of care and aid we received,” Colon said. “I’ve never seen anything like it at all the other schools I’ve attended.”

Wills was forced to move after her home suffered damage during the storms. She received emergency funds and items from the college’s pantry, helping her manage bills and lost wages from the time she had to take off work.

“Receiving aid from the college made me feel like I am more than just a student,” Wills said. “PHSC truly cares about our well-being beyond our education. The college has given me resources and support I wouldn’t have had on my own, especially with two small daughters and another baby on the way. In such an overwhelming time, it felt good to have the emotional and financial support from my school. I am so appreciative of this community I get to call mine.”

In partnership with the PHSC Foundation, staff mobilized quickly after the hurricanes to reach out to students, gathering information on their needs and letting them know how the college could assist.

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"Many of the losses students suffered were heartbreaking," said Brittany Peterson-Jackson, PHSC's Coordinator of Mental Health and Well-Being. "Being able to reach out personally and provide assistance was incredibly meaningful. We worked hard to make the process of getting needed items to students as smooth as possible."

The college also provided emergency funds to students affected by the hurricanes, with the support of a grant from the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay and contributions from the PHSC Foundation, which raised funds from the local community, faculty, staff, and local banks.

"During a time when students were turning to multiple sources for disaster relief – often encountering long wait times and disappointing refusals – it was incredibly meaningful to be a source that said 'yes,'" said Chiquita Henderson, Assistant Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs.

Putting student needs first comes naturally to PHSC, one of more than 140 Caring Campuses throughout the country with a commitment to prioritizing student needs to help ensure their success. PHSC's Student Life and Leadership team initially put the hurricane relief effort together, but soon there was a large outpouring of additional faculty and staff volunteering their time to help.

"It all comes back to the foundational core values of our institution, which is community," said Bob Bade, Vice President of Student Affairs. "We are a critical part of the support network our students rely on. They know that we're here for them, in whatever way we can be, and we will always meet them where they are."

Beyond emergency relief, Caring Campus has become embedded in the daily life at PHSC. The college lives these values through initiatives like the "Bobcat Bobblehead," which is passed on to staff who embody the spirit of Caring Campus. Another initiative, "Release of the Quackins," deploys thousands of rubber ducks with positive messages around campus each fall to encourage and inspire students.

"Staff and faculty members showing genuine care and interest can make a huge difference, and we work to make sure each of our students feels that support," Bade said. "Caring Campus has provided us with a clear framework and a set of guiding principles that bring this vision to life."

PHSC's retention rates consistently rank above the national average, with internal metrics reflecting steady gains in fall-to-fall retention.

"PHSC's efforts are a testament to the power of connection and support in shaping student success," Caring Campus founder and CEO Dr. Brad Phillips said. "They've shown how a true culture of care can make a lasting impact – both during a crisis and every other day."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

IEBC_PASCO-HERNANDO1: Pasco-Hernando State College in Florida, a Caring Campus, demonstrated an unwavering commitment to student care during the recent hurricanes, with staff and faculty going above and beyond to provide critical support to students in need.

IEBC_PASCO-HERNANDO2: Pasco-Hernando State College has embedded initiatives inspired by Caring Campus into life on campus, including "Release of the Quackins," which entails thousands of rubber ducks with positive messages being released around campus each fall to provide encouragement to students.

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