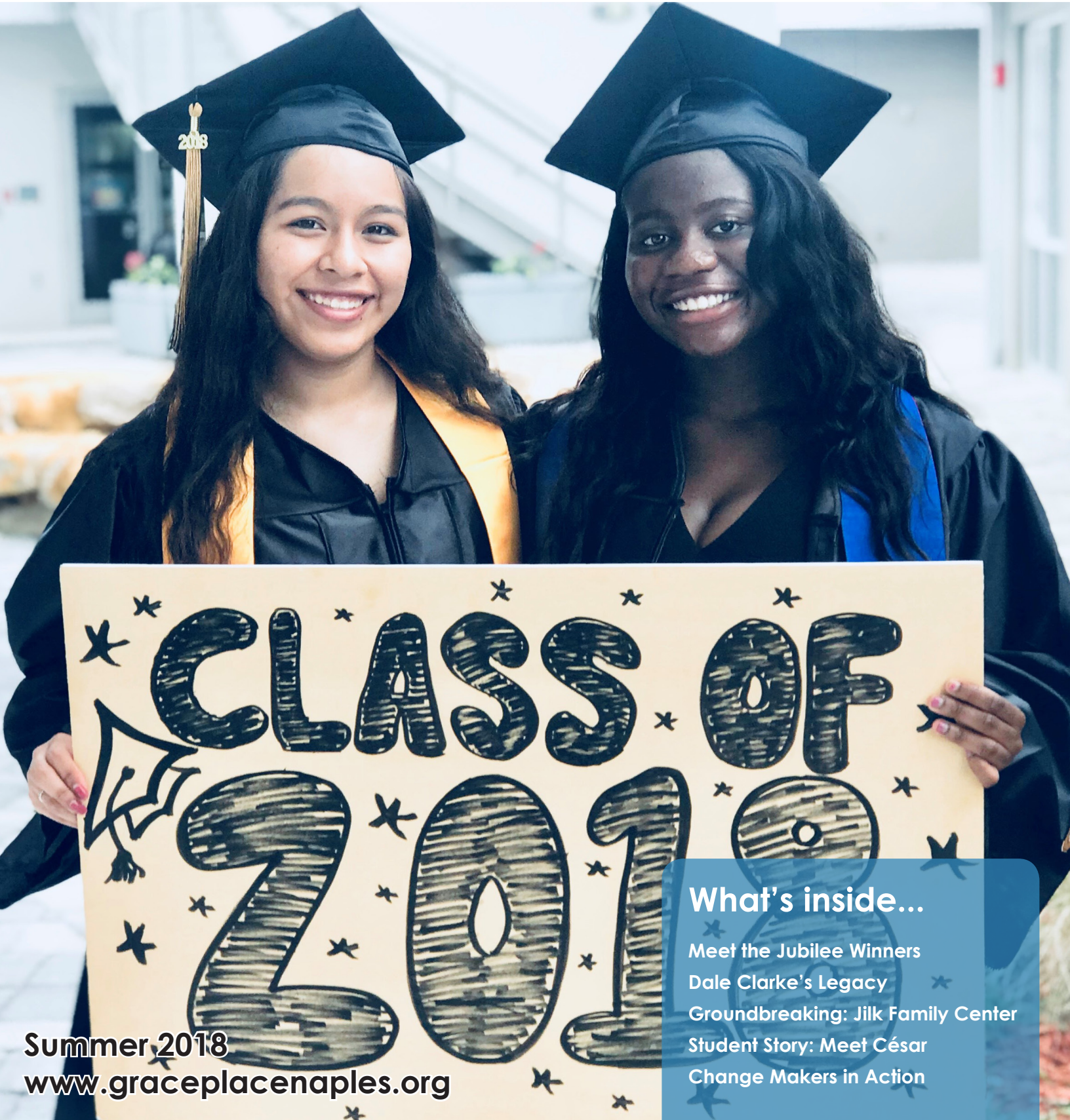




The Learning Curve

BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO THE LIVES YOU'VE CHANGED



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Summer 2018

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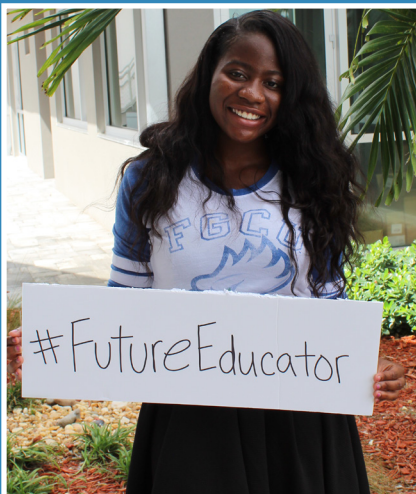
“You’ve won the Jubilee Scholarship.”

Five words that changed Karen Merillien and Marlen Hernandez’s lives forever.

The Jubilee Scholarship, a four-year “full ride” to Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), is offered exclusively to two Grace Place AP Leadership students each year. The scholarship includes all tuition costs, books, housing and a living allowance so students can focus on academics. It is a distinguished honor and a life-changing opportunity. This year’s recipients, Karen and Marlen, could not be more deserving of this prestigious award.

Both of these young women have struggled. Both of them have worked far harder, and held far more responsibility, than the average teenager. When other students their age were worried about who did or didn’t “like” them, or what they were going to wear to school tomorrow, Karen and Marlen’s concerns were much more serious. “Will my family be able to pay both this month’s rent and utilities?” “How will I ever pay for college?” These questions weighed continually on their minds.

All the late nights studying, weekend social activities missed, grueling hours of extra homework and countless clubs were worth it. Never again will Karen or Marlen worry it was all in vain because they won’t be able to afford college in the end. Their financial barriers have been lifted and they have been empowered to reach their full potential, thanks to generous allies in our mission to provide pathways out of poverty through education.



MEET KAREN

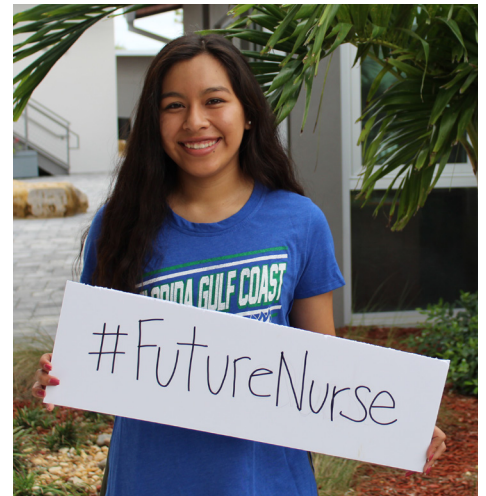
At the young age of seventeen, Karen knows the meaning of “living paycheck to paycheck” all too well. Her mother works two jobs as a Certified Nursing Assistant and her father has been a banquet server at local hotels for eighteen years. No one can say they aren’t hard workers, but their incomes are not always enough to support Karen, her two siblings, and their extended family who live with them. There have been many times that Karen has had to contribute her own paycheck to help keep the household solvent.

Despite hardships and the weight of financial burdens, Karen’s family has always placed a priority on her and her siblings’ schooling. Karen’s mother, especially, instilled in her a deep appreciation of the power of education.

On top of working two jobs, Karen was dual enrolled at Golden Gate High School (GGHS) and Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW). Her extracurricular activities included Grace Place’s AP Leadership program, College Reach-Out Program, Key Club, Student Government, Cheerleading and Marching Band. She accumulated over 130 volunteer hours, giving her time in our Academy of Leaders afterschool program, at Project Unify and serving on the Make-a-Wish Foundation’s Youth Leadership Committee. At FGCU, Karen plans to earn a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education before pursuing a master’s in education.

MEET MARLEN

Despite obstacles, Marlen set her sights high from the start. Like Karen, Marlen was also dual enrolled at GGHS and FSW, and was the recipient of the Outstanding Achievement in Dual Enrollment award in May 2017. On top of maintaining a 5.02 weighted GPA, her extracurricular activities included the National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, Grace Place AP Leadership program, KidsCAN and soccer. She volunteered at the Domestic Animal Shelter, Grace Place, Naples Zoo and St. Agnes Youth Group, amassing over 120 volunteer hours. At FGCU, Marlen plans to explore different fields of nursing while pursuing her degree. After she graduates college, her intention is to remain in Collier County so she can give back to the community that gave so many opportunities to her and her family.



When she graduated GGHS in May, she ranked eighth in her class of over 360. Marlen is an impressive and gifted young student who, in the face of adversity, remained steadfast in her resolve to commit to her studies.

The AP Leadership program aims to eliminate the obstacles to higher education that students from families with low-incomes face. Beyond the opportunity to win the Jubilee Scholarship, students in the program receive assistance navigating the college application process and identifying scholarships, college knowledge workshops, college visits, mentoring, ACT preparation, and many more resources to access post-secondary education.

Now, thanks to the support and love of their families, and the transformative AP Leadership program, Karen and Marlen will have the chance to meet their full potential, build prosperous and fulfilling careers and lives, and pay it forward to a new generation.

"I am going to college." Five words that changed two lives this spring, thanks to you.



Dale Clarke Scholarship Endowment Fund, the gift that keeps giving....

Grace Place received its first gift establishing an endowed scholarship this winter, celebrating the life of Dale Clarke.

This beautiful legacy began with Dale's strong belief in the transformational power of education and his great respect for those persevering in the face of adversity.

Dale related to the students of Grace Place on a personal level. He grew up in a very loving home but not a very wealthy one, and could remember being teased as a child for not having the school supplies he needed. When he heard about the Grace Place school supply drive through his church several years ago, he was eager to give.

Once Dale and his wife Bonnie became involved at Grace Place, they found other bonds to Grace Place's families. Dale and Bonnie traveled extensively during their life together, befriending locals in the many countries they visited and falling in love with how their cultures put family at the center of life. Before Dale met Bonnie, he also spent many years living and traveling in the Caribbean. Bonnie recalls Dale telling her how impressed he was with the people he met there, their resilience, and their unwavering ability to find joy even when faced with the most adverse circumstances. He saw the same family focus and grit in the students at Grace Place.

"Grace Place's families reminded Dale of the wonderful people we met on our many journeys," remarks Bonnie. "This legacy would make him phenomenally happy, proud and grateful to know that he will be able to help a young adult reach that next level in their education. This way of honoring his life suits his memory. It's a perfect match."

The Dale Clarke Scholarship will be awarded to one AP Leadership student each year and will be paid directly to the university or postsecondary training program of their choosing. To learn more about how you can support the dreams of one of our hardworking students by establishing an endowed scholarship, contact Barbara Evans, Chief Development Officer, at 239.234.2403 or by email at barbara@graceplacenaples.org.



Clockwise from left to right: Dale and Bonnie in their home, Dale in the Azores, and Dale on a camel while traveling Egypt

A Swing of Grace Golf Outing Raises Record-Breaking \$200,000 to Benefit Family Literacy Programs at Grace Place

We held our seventh annual A Swing of Grace golf outing this April, raising a record-breaking net total of \$200,000, with a cost ratio of only eleven percent.

Over 160 golfers from as far north as Cape Coral came out to support Grace Place's mission to put faith into action, providing pathways out of poverty by educating children and families. After the golfers returned from the greens, they were joined by additional dinner guests for the evening's program, silent auction and strolling dinner.

The eighth annual golf outing will be co-chaired by Erik Lutgert and Jim Bosscher. The event is slated for April 27, 2019, at Wyndemere Country Club.



William Meek, Larry Berg, Victoria Van Leight, John Jordan



Mario Valle, Barbara Evans, Bob Montagano, Tim Ferguson, Erik Lutgert and Nita Rapp



"Because of the Jilk family's extraordinary generosity, Grace Place will be strategically positioned to optimize its impact in this community of great need and to change the landscape of Golden Gate city through its family literacy programs."

- Mario Valle, Grace Place Board Chair

Construction has begun on the Jilk Family Center. The Jilk Family Center will be a dynamic enrichment center providing a music studio, an art studio and a large multi-purpose room for wellness activities, community gatherings and for use by vetted nonprofit partners. In addition, the Jilk Family Center will house much-needed storage and distribution space for our Friday Food Pantry, which distributes over 350,000 pounds of food a year to families in our community. This new space will be equipped with a walk-in refrigerator/freezer – allowing increased intake of fruits, vegetables, dairy and meats to the pantry – and a dedicated storage closet for our long-term partner, Baby Basics.

The 9,000 square foot building is made possible by a generous gift from Patricia and Craig Jilk. Since retiring to the Naples area in 1999, the couple have been active in the philanthropic community with multiple gifts to educational nonprofits helping children and families from households with low-incomes.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHT: MEET CÉSAR



"I'm so proud of and happy for my son. He knows many things: all the letters, he knows so many words and even writes little sentences."

- Guillermina, César's Mom

César will start kindergarten in August. When he does, he won't just be "kindergarten ready." He is performing above average for his age in cognitive, literacy, and social/emotional skills.

He will enter school for the first time already well-acclimated to a classroom environment. He will start with the ability to count from one to fifty, to identify colors, to read small books, to sing the English and Spanish alphabets, and to happily and constructively socialize with other children. César even writes in full sentences. He will not be one of the 16 percent of Collier County Public School students who have been identified to have limited English proficiency (collierschools.com). In fact, he's proficient in two languages.

If César and his mother hadn't been part of Grace Place's Bright Beginnings program since he was one-month old, the start of his academic career could easily have been a rocky one. César's family lives with an income below the poverty line and speaks primarily Spanish at home. When César finishes middle school, he will have been in school longer than either of his parents. Children who grow up in environments with these risk factors are frequently among the 34 percent of children in Collier County who start kindergarten unprepared (Future Ready Collier), and many will continue to struggle throughout their academic careers.

Because of his parents' determination and commitment to their child's education, Grace Place's Bright Beginnings program, and the support of generous people like you, César has cleared the first major hurdle toward a lifetime of achievement and prosperity. Together, we are moving the needle.



CHANGE MAKERS IN ACTION

As technologies continue to emerge and evolve, digital literacy is becoming increasingly important both at home and in the workplace. In response to this growing demand, and at the request of our students, Grace Place launched a Digital Literacy course.

The course had a similar beginning to Grace Place itself; a group of dedicated individuals with vision came together to address a need in the community.

"When I first came to Grace Place to volunteer, I was interested in teaching adults English, but then the volunteer experience manager noticed my thirty-year career at IBM on my application. She asked if I'd be willing to help launch a new Adult Education course called Digital Literacy," comments Melanie. "I needed a little time to think about it. If I was going to do this, I wanted to do it right. After a little reflection, I agreed. I knew this would be an opportunity to make a real impact. It was exciting!"

Melanie recruited Janet (a former IBM colleague), and Sue and Debbie (former employees at Kraft Corporate headquarters). Now all they needed were individuals with teaching backgrounds, so they enlisted Robin (retired faculty at the University of Maryland) and Mercy (a former assistant professor at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine) to help with instruction. The team was formed.

Their first class of eleven students was enrolled for an eight week pilot course. It quickly became clear they needed more time. "I remember in our first semester I saved the email lesson for the seventh week. I figured everyone would log in to their email and we would work on the basics. It took the entire class time just to log everyone in. Now, in every class, the first thing students do is log in to their email. They've got it down to only a few minutes," recalls Melanie. "These adults have very practical needs. They need to be able to communicate with teachers, register with doctors, and to be able to pay bills. It's a digital world. These have become necessary skills. We had a student last semester that we helped log in and see their credit card balance for the first time."

Mercy recalls a lesson when she was discussing local resources that can be accessed through the internet. One of her students, Benjamin, asked her to help him borrow a book from the library. "He had his library card on him. I helped him log in and this look of pure excitement came over his face. He said 'Oh my gosh!' He was like a kid at Christmas. All of a sudden he had so many resources available to him, he just had to log in. He could reserve books in any of the libraries across town." She remembers that moment and the humbling feeling it gave her. "We take for granted so much of our relationship with the internet. We use it every day, we check email, we surf the internet, and we search Google. It's not like that for these students. It's another foreign language to them."

Having spent this year creating a curriculum tailored to the needs of our Grace Place families, these change makers are looking forward to adding an additional level of coursework for more advanced students next year.

Students were tested using the Minnesota Literacy Council's Northstar Digital Literacy Project assessment. Once assessments have been reviewed, student results will be posted on the Adult Education page of our website at www.graceplacenaples.org/adult-education.



Melanie, Sue, Debbie, Janet, Robin, and Mercy



Digital Literacy students Benjamin, Urbino, and Renoir



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If you are ready to make a gift, contact Barbara Evans, Chief Development Officer, by phone at 239.234.2403 or by email at barbara@graceplacenaples.org.