



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **The CFHLA Foundation Hits A Major Milestone With Over \$1 Million in Awarded Hospitality Student Scholarships**

**Orlando, FL** (April 27, 2022) – On Tuesday, April 26, 2022, the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association (CFHLA), in partnership with the CFHLA Foundation and through the support of our members, proudly announced that the organization had awarded over **\$1,050,588** in Hospitality Student Scholarships since 2000. This includes another **\$116,000** that was distributed during yesterday’s Annual Gives Luncheon, which was held at the Caribe Royale Orlando.

In total, 44 Central Florida students were awarded Hospitality Student Scholarships, five new students were presented with Family Member Scholarships, and two current Hospitality Employees received the “Mike Smukall Memorial Scholarships.” In addition, CFHLA awarded **Valencia College** with **Year 9 of a 10-year \$5,000 educational grant, totaling \$50,000**, and collected **over 64,000 items in the CFHLA Cares Drive**, which supports the homeless students of Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties.



“While 2021 was another challenging year for the tourism and hospitality community, CFHLA remained dedicated and worked tirelessly to secure monetary donations from our MVP Committee members, the CFHLA Board of Directors and the entire membership, as well as physical donations for two successful on-line auctions,” said Robert Agrusa, president and CEO of the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association. “CFHLA is incredibly proud to support these extraordinary students, who

are seeking the opportunity to improve their education and build future careers in hospitality.”

Three of CFHLA’s largest hospitality student scholarships that were awarded included Osceola High School student **Merelin Almonte**, Wekiva High School student **Jonah Thompson** and Apopka High School student **Sophia Chase-Azzoui**. Merelin was awarded a \$5,000 Landform of Central Florida scholarship and Jonah was proudly awarded a Don and Lorraine Freeberg Foundation \$7,500 scholarship to continue their studies at Valencia College this fall. Lastly, Sophia was awarded the eighth consecutive Don and Lorraine Freeberg Foundation “Full-Ride” scholarship, totaling \$40,000, as she attends the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management upon graduation.



From L to R: CFHLA President/CEO Robert Agrusa, Loren Burns, Training and Development Manager at the Caribe Royale Orlando, Wekiva High School Student Jonah Thompson and Apopka High School Student Sophia Chase-Azzoui, and Amaury Piedra, General Manager of the Caribe Royale Orlando

Additionally, five Family Member Scholarships were distributed to a child of a front-line lodging employee, at the following properties in Central Florida:

- Lyman High School Senior and soon to be Seminole State College of Florida student **Teresa D’sa**, child of John Paul D’sa of the Signia by Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek
- Orange County Technical College student **Antonio Farris**, child of Guyen Le of Marriott’s Cypress Harbour
- Valencia College student **Lusiana Mavarez**, child of Nairobi Chirinos of the Hyatt Regency Orlando
- Windermere High School Senior and soon to be Tallahassee Community College student **Madison Murdoch**, child of Stephanie Vaughn of the Hilton Garden Inn Apopka
- Freedom High School Senior and soon to be UCF student **Hillary Quach**, child of Vinh Quach of the DoubleTree by Hilton at the Entrance to Universal Orlando

Lastly, **Robert Coleman**, Chief Engineer at the Tru by Hilton Orlando Convention Center and **Claudiu Cornea**, Engineer at the Wyndham and Wyndham Garden Lake Buena Vista Disney Springs Resort Area, each received \$1,000 from the “Mike Smukall Memorial Scholarship” fund to help support their continuing individual training, education and/or certifications within the hospitality industry.



The Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association's mission is to advance tourism and the community through hospitality. As the world's largest regional lodging association, CFHLA represents approximately 80 percent of the more than 129,000 hotel rooms in Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties, and nearly 500 "supplier" organizations that do business with the hospitality and tourism industries.

For more information on the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association, please visit [www.cfhla.org](http://www.cfhla.org).

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