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FLORIDA MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

## Florida Memorial University and Denny's partner on resource center for single-parent students

BY WILMA HERNANDEZ WHERNANDEZ@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Single parents at Florida Memorial University now have a place to go for counseling, career advising and other services.

The Denny's Single Parent Student Resource Center opened its doors Thursday during a luncheon attended by faculty and staff, students, and Denny's restaurant executives.

"I'll guarantee you'll see the results of this investment," said Karl S. Wright, FMU President. "You won't see it in dollars and cents, but you will see it in the amount of students that will graduate in four years as opposed to six," Wright told an audience of about 150 attendees on Oct. 9.

The center will offer workshops to help students to focus on their careers, while dealing with the challenges of being single parents, said Barbara Edwards, Wright's executive assistant. Out of 1807 students enrolled at FMU this semester, about 200 are single parents.

Wright said many FMU students come from financially challenged homes. He said the average yearly income of an FMU student is \$30,000, and it costs about \$20,000 a year to attend the university.

### DETAILS

The Denny's Parenting Resource Center is based on the campus of Florida Memorial University, 15800 NW 42nd Ave in Miami Gardens.

The working hours for the center are Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. On Fridays it opens by appointment only.

For more information, call 305-626-3607.

Funded by Denny's restaurants, the \$70,000 resource center is housed in a portable classroom near the school administration building.

It features a reading room, a children's playroom, and two fully equipped computer stations. The reading room offers a variety of children's books. The playroom has a TV/VCR, toys and games to keep children entertained while their parents do school work.

Single-parent students must register at the center at the beginning of the term to qualify for services, including access to the facility's study area, counseling, career guidance, tutoring and on-site child care while utilizing the center.

Students will also be assisted in finding part-time jobs and internships. All services are free and there is no registration fee.

Forty students have already registered.

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In addition, the center will also work as a support system for single-parent students, to encourage them to network and help each other.

"We really want to encourage these students to stay by giving them these supporting services," Edwards said. "They have a higher chance of getting better employment, and providing a better life for their families when they have a degree."

FMU is the only historically black college in South Florida. Because the region is a key market for Denny's, the partnership makes a lot of sense, said Louis Laguardia, Denny's senior vice president of human resources and diversity.

"This is just a seed we wanted to plant, and we hope others will follow the model," Laguardia said. "These are tough times when corporations need to step up to the plate and make sure they don't neglect the needs of communities where they do business."

Laguardia said single parents are a tremendous group of people.

"It takes a lot of courage and determination from them, and if we can help them to succeed in any way, it would be a great thing," Laguardia said. "At the end of the day, these people will be our future hires. That's the way businesses need to look at it."

The part-time center coordinator, Alstene McKinney, is the support shoulder for students.

Assisted by two students, McKinney is in charge of coordinating programs and evaluating the overall success of the center.

McKinney, a retired teacher of 41 years, said she stocked the reading room with books from her personal library.

"I will read to the children, and I will give them a book to take home, so they can start their own library," McKinney said.

McKinney said she will also serve as a counselor. She already has a group of students to counsel.

"Sometimes they just need somebody to shut up and listen, and that's what I'm here for," McKinney said. "I'm also trying to find a bus for some students who are in need of transportation to school."

Students who will benefit from the center voiced their excitement.

Gale Hyde, a senior majoring in elementary education, said the center was always there. Hyde, mother of 9-year-old Emmanuel Bell, said the people at FMU have always cared for her success and the well-being of her child.

"Being a single mom is very stressful, and to know I have someone there to go to, instead of going home and pulling my hair, is very powerful," Hyde said.

Chad Graham, a senior student of marketing and business major, said he will use the tutoring service for his son Donte Graham, 12. Graham also wants his other son, Chad Jr., to be a part of the college life, and look up to him as a role model.

"I don't have enough time to tutor him. At the center, he will practice his comprehensive skills," said Graham.

"Being confident that he will get good grades, I'll be able to focus on my school work."

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