

BLUEPRINT nursing scholarship is her first step to medical career



Ebony Thompson

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the strenuous academic schedule.

That was in August. After scoring high marks, Ebony joined nine other candidates from a waiting list of hundreds to begin the accelerated nursing program on August 26.

Thanks to a \$40,000 commitment from the City of Orlando and the generosity of Orlando Tech, Valencia College, and others, the ten students receive a full tuition that includes lab fees, books, and bus passes, courtesy of LYNX.

Today, Ebony balances the challenges of being a full-time nursing student and a part-time employee. "It's stressful," Ebony admits. "I definitely have improved my time management skills, and there are still not enough hours in the day. But I know it will pay off in the end."

She's right. LPNs in Florida earn \$40,000 a year on average, and RNs average around \$64,000 annually. A recent study revealed that careers in healthcare will be among the fastest growing over the next twenty years.

Orlando, in particular, will be on the leading edge of this job boom, thanks to Medical City, the 7,000-acre biomedical complex near Lake Nona. The newly formed Orlando Medical Careers Partnership is designed to provide educational and professional opportunities to Orlando residents who have the enthusiasm but not the education or funding to pursue them.

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer said, "The Orlando Medical Careers Partnership offers the chance to create a well-trained workforce to fill the tens of thousands of potential jobs and lift the economic standards for Orlando's working families."

Ebony's initial goal is to become an RN within the two-year program offered through the BLUEPRINT scholarship program, and she's hard at work. Daily classes at Orlando Tech from 7:45 to 2:15 are supplemented by an almost three-hour microbiology course at Valencia two evenings a week. There's also homework — a lot of it. A "light night" will have three hours of studying, and although it's stressful, Ebony is thankful for the opportunity.

"It's a lot of labor. It's a lot of studying. Fortunately, science comes naturally to me, and if the daytime lecture ends a little early, I get a jump on homework then," Ebony says. She works Friday nights until eleven and on the weekend to keep the bills at bay. Ebony and her sister are roommates, and in addition to saving on expenses, her sister is a doting aunt to AJ.

"I wouldn't be able to do this without support," Ebony says. "I know that I can't spend as much time with my son as I would like to, but when I do, it's quality time. We read at bedtime. He has a good daycare program and my sister helps a lot. She says AJ is really her son, I just happened to carry him," Ebony added with a laugh.

A year from now, Ebony can take the LPN exam. By 2015, she'll have accumulated enough education and clinical training to sit for the RN test, a process which usually takes three or even four years. After that, Ebony's ultimate goal is to become a medical doctor — and teach.

That makes Orlando City Commissioner Daisy W. Lynum, the visionary who was the driving force behind the medical partnerships program, very happy.

"Ebony was raised in my district: Parramore. The faces you see in my district are too often underrepresented in medical careers," said Commissioner Lynum. "That's why, in addition to scholarships like the one Ebony is using and with other work-study programs offered by our medical careers partners, we're focusing on early childhood science education. All of the schools in my district now have a dedicated science teacher that will help stimulate the love of learning that will follow students through their education and cumulate in more nurses, more doctors, and more healthcare professionals regardless of race, creed, or gender. People like Ebony Thompson are the face and spirit of tomorrow's medical future." ▲

Pieters Sees Numerous Opportunities for Minority, Women Businesses



Brindley Pieters

Brindley Pieters saw an opportunity in Central Florida for a business that offered premiere engineering service to a diverse group of clients. He created Brindley Pieters & Associates, Inc. in 1991 in pursuit of that dream, and the company has grown to include clients from private firms to city, county and state agencies. Pieters built a staff that includes registered professional engineers who specialize in civil, structural, drainage, and transportation disciplines as well as construction management and cost estimating. The team also includes CAD/technical specialists and administrative personnel. All of these professionals come together to form a business that offers a wide range of services.

As a certified minority business enterprise (MWBE), Brindley Pieters & Associates, Inc. has also received support from the BLUEPRINT program, which was created by Orlando Mayor

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need to succeed and find high-wage, high-skilled jobs,” says Mayor Dyer.

“I am very proud of the success of the BLUEPRINT Employment Office. It is an amazing example of what it means to improve the lives of local families, many of whom live in my district. Every day, the agency helps dozens of qualified candidates search for jobs that lead them to self-sufficiency and change their lives,” says Commissioner Lynum.

Balark says he heard about the Dr. Phillips Center project and learned that it was hiring for the first phase of construction. Balark says talking with the team at the BLUEPRINT

Employment Office was more than he ever expected.

“At the BLUEPRINT (Employment Office), I really liked how their concerns where on job placement and helping minorities and folks in Parramore. That really appealed to me,” he explains. “When I interviewed at the BLUEPRINT Employment Office, they targeted my experience and finding me a spot based on my qualifications and experience. I thought it was too good to be true.”

Within a week of his interview, Balark posted his resume, and got the call he was hoping: a full-time mason tender position on the Dr.

Phillips Performing Arts Center project. He enthusiastically encourages people to visit the BLUEPRINT Employment Office.

“I don’t know where I would have been without the BLUEPRINT (Employment Office). It’s good for minorities like myself because we don’t get opportunities like this for sustained employment without having relationships. I have recommended so many people to the Office, and each one has found a job.”

From his success on the Dr. Phillips Center project, Balark has now been asked by his supervisors to work on a new masonry job at Universal Studios. ▲

City of Orlando
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Buddy Dyer, District 5 City Commissioner Daisy W. Lynum and the Orlando City Commissioners. The BLUEPRINT ensures that Orlando residents and business owners benefit from Community Venues. The BLUEPRINT gives MWBEs a chance to bid on new projects.

“We were fortunate to perform engineering services for both the Amway Center and performing arts center project,” Pieters said. “We have worked with the City for several years and appreciate the work of the BLUEPRINT program staff.

They not only encourage small businesses and MWBEs to participate in the bid process, but they also help them navigate the process.”

Mayor Dyer says the BLUEPRINT program is a key driver of economic growth in Orlando.

“The City hosts informational forums for entrepreneurs so that they can learn about upcoming contract opportunities. They can also meet with prime contractors working on the Community Venue projects,” Mayor Dyer said.

At least 18 percent of Community

Venues projects go to minority-owned firms, and 6 percent go to women-owned businesses. This helps the BLUEPRINT program empower business owners to be successful, which in turn helps get Orlando residents back to work.

“The City’s BLUEPRINT office provides MWBEs with opportunities, but it also connects those businesses with local residents in need of work,” Commissioner Lynum said. “That way, BLUEPRINT encourages Orlando residents to build businesses, look for jobs and be successful.” ▲

BLUEPRINT Program Office • Janeiro Coulter, Special Projects Manager • 407.246.3180
BLUEPRINT Employment Office • 1200 West South Street • Orlando, FL 32805 • 407.246.4490
venues.blueprint@cityoforlando.net