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## 'Visionary act' benefits MDC's nursing program

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Healthcare and jobs have been two constants in the political season. They have been debated to the point of confusion by the candidates and political partisans. But there can be no debate or confusion about the critical jobs that need to be filled in our South Florida healthcare community — services that affect everyone reading this today.

Forty percent of Florida's nurses will be lost to retirement in the near future. Factor in demand from retiring baby boomers and we're staring at a deficit of 11,000 nurses in the next two years and 50,000 in ten years. Nationally, the need will be 1.2 million by 2020 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

South Florida will be vulnerable as few communities in the nation. But to our great advantage, someone is doing something about it. This week, the León family and Leon Medical Centers announced a donation of \$5 million to Miami Dade College's (MDC) School of Nursing. This donation represents a visionary act of corporate citizenship.

In recognition of this most generous and forward-thinking gesture, the college will rename the school the Benjamin Leon School of Nursing and will ensure a dependable pipeline of well-trained professionals for our healthcare facilities.

MDC is respected for many of its academic offerings but none more than our nursing program. Started 50 years ago, it offers several entry points to a career in nursing. Full- and part-time options exist as do special tracks for LPNs and an accelerated option for those with bachelor's degree in other fields.

MDC's nursing program is the nation's largest, enrolling close to 2,000 students and graduating more nurses than any other institution in the country. More than 50 percent of the nurses in our community are trained at MDC. It was the county's first integrated school of nursing and today graduates more minority nurses than any other college or university in the nation. Forty-eight percent of MDC nurses are African American compared to 9 percent nationally; 29 percent are Hispanic compared to 6 percent nationally.

MDC's Medical Campus, established in 1974, became the first stand-alone campus in the United States dedicated exclusively to health career education. Today, the Medical Campus offers entry to 23 healthcare careers in addition to nursing, including physician assistant studies, dental, opticianry, radiology and nuclear medicine specialties, emergency medical technician, veterinary technology and much more. Degrees include the bachelor of science, associate in science and short-term certifications in high demand technical specialties. MDC has offered the Bachelor of Science in Nursing since 2008 and added the Bachelor of Science in Physician Assistant studies in 2010.

The Medical Campus is a state-of-the-art learning environment that has pioneered the use of high tech human patient simulators. Each nursing graduate is prepared with knowledge and technical expertise in obstetrics, pediatrics, geriatrics, medical/surgical, psychiatric and leadership nursing. Clinical rotations connect nursing students to more than 200 hospital and clinical facilities across the county. MDC's nursing students as well as students from the School of Allied Health programs participate in year-round community service programs that offer health screenings and clinical services to residents.

The Leon family gift will allow the college to grow the nursing program in several critical areas. The Leon Scholars Program will provide full scholarships to outstanding students each year who have completed the Associate in Science in Nursing degree and will enter the Bachelor of Science program.

Ongoing faculty and staff development will be an additional priority, aiming to provide one of the nation's most respected programs with professional expertise in the latest medical advances. Lastly, the Leon gift will sponsor the MDC/Leon Family Lecture series, bringing experts from across our community and the nation to address the latest developments in the field.

With this donation, the Leon family has raised the bar on corporate citizenship and community engagement. Their support for MDC's nursing program recognizes the essential collaboration between industry and higher education. MDC remains committed to serving the needs of the South Florida community, and with the great partnership of the Leon Medical Centers we are sure to set an even higher standard of excellence.

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