

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2022

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Corporate Donors Help More than 135,000 Florida Students Receive Books by Supporting Florida's At-Home Literacy Program

Under the leadership of House Speaker Chris Sprowls, the Florida Legislature created the New Worlds Reading Initiative to be the largest literacy program of its kind in the U.S., delivering free books and supplementary learning resources to eligible K-5 students across the state. With more than half a million Florida children eligible for the initiative, lawmakers recognized the need for robust ongoing funding. To keep the initiative sustainable, a key funding source was identified: corporate donors committed to supporting their communities.

As the state-appointed administrator of the New Worlds Reading Initiative, the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning is a registered Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) that is eligible to accept tax credit contributions to support the initiative. Under the New Worlds Reading Initiative, corporate taxpayers can make monetary contributions to the UF Lastinger Center and receive dollar-for-dollar credit against select Florida taxes.

"We're immeasurably grateful for the support of our donors," said Dr. Shaunté Duggins, the assistant director of the New Worlds Reading Initiative. "Their generous contributions ensure we can partner with even more of Florida's families to nurture a lifelong love of reading in our children. We believe that reading shapes who people are, and who they will become — that reading makes you, you."

"Children and their success are at the heart of what we do," said Dr. Phil Poekert, the director of the UF Lastinger Center. "We are proud and honored to administer the New Worlds Reading Initiative for the State of Florida. We are profoundly grateful for the generosity of our corporate partners that will ensure we can support Florida kids and their families for years to come."

The University of Florida Lastinger Center has worked with companies across the state to secure support for the literacy program. In just a few short months since the program began, \$50 million has already been raised across three years.

"It was an honor to stand beside our partners Wednesday as we celebrated the tremendous milestone of reaching \$50 million in corporate sponsorships for the New Worlds Reading Initiative," said Speaker Chris Sprowls. "The creativity of our Members in offering a tax credit to those who support our vision empowered us to reach this point, and none of it would have been possible without the dedicated leadership of Representative Trabulsy and Chair Latvala. Thank you to our sponsors for investing in our goal of getting every

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Florida child reading on grade level. Everyone who gathered with us Wednesday will have a transformational impact on our next generation, because when a child can read, they can learn, & when they can learn, the door to limitless possibilities is opened."

An illustrious list of companies has donated thus far, including: Charter Communications, Duke Energy, Florida Power & Light, HCA Healthcare, Southern Eagle Distributing, Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, TD SYNEX, TECO, Tropical Shipping USA, LLC, and Walmart.

"When children have the opportunity to read books that reflect their interests—and when they can see themselves in the story—their enthusiasm for reading grows," said Rahman Khan, Vice President of Community Impact for Charter Communications. "We are thrilled to join with New Worlds Reading to help accelerate learning and create ongoing, positive connections among Florida families, schools, and communities."

"At Duke Energy, we believe in making an impact today for a brighter tomorrow," said Melissa Seixas, Duke Energy Florida state president. "We are proud to support this incredible initiative to bring books directly to families, giving children across the state the opportunity to reach their full potential and develop a lifelong love of reading."

"At Florida Power & Light, we are always working to strengthen the communities we serve for generations to come, and that starts with creating opportunities for our youth," said Pam Rauch, Florida Power & Light, Vice President of External Affairs and Economic Development. "We are honored to support the New World Reading Initiative to open the exciting world of reading and knowledge to children across our state through providing books and learning resources."

"At HCA Healthcare we are committed to bringing healthier tomorrows to our communities, which includes investing in resources for children across Florida," said Ravi Chari, MD, President and CEO, HCA Healthcare West Florida Division, part of HCA Florida Healthcare. "Our children are our future, and we all have a responsibility in helping provide the best tools and resources for them and their well-being. We are so excited about partnering with New Worlds Reading to help the children of our state reach and achieve their fullest potential through the power of books and literacy."

"Southern Eagle Distributing has always believed in supporting our community and helping to provide every opportunity for our children to succeed, are happy to now add this great initiative to our efforts," said Philip Busch, the president of Southern Eagle Distributing. "We applaud the hard work of Representative Dana Trabulsy in introducing this bill and Speaker Chris Sprowls for making it a top priority. With the launch of the New Worlds Reading Program, the future of our children becomes brighter."

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"At Southern Glazer's we believe education leads to opportunity, which is why we are proud to fund a number of educational programs across primary, secondary, and college-levels," said Steven Becker, Executive Vice President, Treasurer & Compliance, Southern Glazer's. "We are very happy to be making a long-term funding commitment to the New Worlds Reading Initiative Florida literacy program with the goal of helping more students to realize the power of literacy."

"Corporate Citizenship is at the center of our culture at TD SYNEX," said Jill Kermes, corporate vice president of global corporate communications, TD SYNEX. "We are confident that our partnership with the New Worlds Reading Initiative will directly impact our local Florida communities and help children develop a love for reading at an early age."

"TECO is proud to support the New Worlds Reading Initiative Program because reading and access to literature is the foundation for student success," said Archie Collins, president and chief executive officer of Tampa Electric. "Youth programs and education are cornerstones of our corporate citizenship efforts, and NWRI was a natural fit with those efforts to support opportunities for young people to learn and grow."

"Tropical Shipping is excited to take part in the New Worlds Reading Initiative," said Mr. Jeff Fiser, the president and CEO of Tropical Shipping. "We are focused on our communities, youth, and education!"

"Walmart is proud to support the New Worlds Reading Initiative to provide free books on the doorsteps of elementary students across our state," said Monesia Brown, Director, Public Affairs for Walmart. "At Walmart, we are committed to helping our customers live better. Giving children the opportunity to reach their full potential through developing their skills and a love for reading is a small way we can impact lives."

Due to the outpouring of support from corporate donors, the Florida legislature has passed an amendment to raise the donation cap to \$60 million for the 2024-2025 state fiscal year and beyond. This amendment is awaiting the Governor's signature. The guidelines set out by the legislature ensure that the donations go to what is most important: putting books into the hands of children.

For more information about the program, visit www.newworldsreading.com.

About the UF Lastinger Center for Learning:

Housed within the University of Florida College of Education, the Lastinger Center for Learning is an education innovation hub that develops solutions designed to improve

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outcomes across three education milestones: kindergarten readiness, reading proficiency by third grade, and algebra proficiency by ninth grade. The Lastinger Center's innovations serve children and educators in every community in Florida and have expanded both nationally and globally. The remarkable scope of the Lastinger Center's work and the impact of its collective efforts have drawn state, national, and international recognition and investment. Learn more at www.lastingercenter.com.

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