

Ray Cross: UW System partner Fund for Wisconsin Scholars improves lives

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One of the pleasures of leading the University of Wisconsin System is listening to students describe how our campuses have improved their lives.

I had another reminder of that at the recent 10th anniversary celebration of the Fund for Wisconsin Scholars (FFWS), the magnificent \$175-million gift from UW-Madison alumni John and Tashia Morgridge.

I left inspired – by the ingenuity and dedication of the students and the generosity and passion of the Morgridges.

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The Fund for Wisconsin Scholars helps fulfill the mission of the UW System: to increase higher education access and affordability, to improve lives and enrich communities, and to advance knowledge throughout the state of Wisconsin.

Higher education opens doors and lays the foundation for young people to achieve their dreams. And the FFWS provides some of our most needy students the resources they need to enroll in college and progress toward a degree.

Why is this important?

With the number of high school students remaining mostly flat in the coming years and employers in desperate need of talented, skilled workers, it's critical for the UW

System to provide as many opportunities as possible for our young people to feed the talent pipeline.

In the last 10 years, the FFWS has provided more than 7,200 Pell grant-eligible students at UW System campuses with nearly \$74 million in renewable grants that do not have to be repaid. Each year 575 new four-year UW System students are randomly selected to receive a FFWS grant. Since inception, grant recipients have come from every county in Wisconsin.

Because grant aid alone doesn't guarantee that students will stay enrolled and progress toward a degree, FFWS began a mentoring program in 2015-16 at three UW campuses. The program has now expanded to 10 campuses.

We're incredibly proud of the work we do at the University of Wisconsin System.

In 2017-18, a record number of students graduated from the UW System. Our 36,825 graduates at all levels is a 13% increase over 10 years ago. Furthermore, the number of students of color who graduated at all levels was also a record.

All across this state, people are working together to help invigorate Wisconsin's economy and enhance the quality of life for all of our residents. This collaborative effort between the Fund for Wisconsin Scholars and the University of Wisconsin System is another way we are helping to maintain and expand access to our universities and to keep it affordable for Wisconsin's students and families.

-Cross is president of the University of Wisconsin System.