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HCC in the News: Afghani student inspires at HCC's Diversity Awards breakfast

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RIVERVIEW — Khumari Barakzai is a strong believer in human rights for all people, no matter their gender or ethnicity.

Her stance is steeped in the reality of being born and raised in Afghanistan, a country in which men are valued much more than women and where 85 percent of Afghan females have no formal education, according to the statistics division of the United Nations.

Fortunately for her, the now 24-year-old Barakzai did graduate from high school in Afghanistan and, together with her Afghan husband, came to Florida five years ago.

Barakzai since has enrolled as a student a Hillsborough Community College, and her moving story came to light at HCC's recent inaugural Champion of Diversity Awards Breakfast at the Regent.

Barakzai has earned high marks at the college, putting her on track to receive her associate's degree and enroll at the University of South Florida, where she will major in computer science.

Her ultimate objective is to teach computer science at a school in the Tampa Bay area and to offer her skills on a humanitarian level to help educate girls in impoverished countries like Afghanistan, Africa and India.

While it all sounds well and good, Barakzai, who also is close to becoming an American citizen, faced a dire setback in her educational plans several months ago due to her inability to continue paying for her classes at HCC.

But, thanks to the compassion and personal guidance of HCC Dale Mabry campus chemistry instructor Brenda Alanis, she came up with a resolution. Alanis called the young woman and top-notch student into her office after noticing she hadn't been in class for a couple of days, and helped her obtain scholarship money and a part-time on-campus job.

What's more, Barakzai will be named a Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero of Tomorrow later this month as the result of Alanis nominating her. Attached to the designation is a check for $50,000, half of which she'll donate to the Hillsborough Community College Foundation and the remainder she plans to earmark for spending on her philanthropic efforts to assist underserved young people obtain an education.

"Ms. Alanis is the person who helped me during my hard times and her recommendation letters opened so many doors," Barakzai said. "She did anything and everything she could do. She's amazing."

On the flip side, Alanis was presented with the HCC Diversity Council's Exemplary Faculty Award during the Oct. 6 breakfast. The honor was in recognition of her empathy for and offers of assistance to Barakzai and other students of various cultural backgrounds.

"My students drive me to do what I do and I love seeing them succeed," said Alanis, a teacher at the college since 2015.

In addition, Steven Crudup, student activity coordinator on the Dale Mabry campus, was named the diversity council's exemplary staff member; Dr. Jennifer China, dean of student services at the Brandon campus, received the exemplary administrator award; and Suncoast Credit Union, a longtime supporter that in the last 10 years has donated more than $750,000 to the college, was recognized as the school's exemplary corporate sponsor.

Craig Richard, president and CEO of the Tampa Hillsborough Economic Development Corporation, was the event's guest speaker. HCC president Ken Atwater gave the opening remarks and Dr. Joan Holmes, special assistant to the president for equity, diversity and special programs, moderated the program.

"It was a great opportunity to celebrate HCC's diversity," Holmes said. "All the nominees (which numbered more than 250) do so much that people don't know about, so it was a chance to show them that they are really valued."

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The Thomas Lakin Institute for Mentored Leadership (Lakin Institute) named Keith Berry, dean of Academic Affairs at Hillsborough Community College's Ybor City campus, one of its 14 fellows. The Presidents' Round Table, a national association dedicated to supporting African-American leaders and students in community colleges, presents the Lakin Institute annually. Berry previously held the position of professor of History at the Dale Mabry Campus for nearly 20 years. He's a 1987 graduate of Florida A&M University and holds a MA, and Ph.D. from Florida State University.

The Dale Mabry campus broke ground last week on its state-of-the-art Allied Health Building. The four-story, 62,670-square-foot building will contain a simulated hospital that allows multiple health science programs to work together, creating conditions found in real-life situations.

The Ybor City campus will hold its Fall 2017 Arts Immersion Day from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 26. The series features free workshops and master classes with the HCC Visual and Performing Arts programs. Programs include dance, theatre, studio art, photography, graphic design and music. This is an opportunity for prospective students to meet with current HCC students and faculty, tour the campus and learn more about the benefits of training in the arts at HCC. Breakfast and lunch included. To reserve a spot, visit hccfl.edu/campusrsvp/arts.

The college will host open house events at its five campuses this month. All events will be held from 5:30-7:30 p.m., except at Dale Mabry, which will run from 5-7 p.m.: Tuesday (Oct. 17) — SouthShore Campus, 551 24th St. NE, Ruskin; Thursday (Oct. 19) — Brandon Campus, 10414 E Columbus Drive; Oct. 25 — Dale Mabry Campus, 4001 W Tampa Bay Blvd., Oct. 26 — Ybor City Campus, 2112 N 15th St. Oct. 30 — Plant City Campus, 1206 N Park Road.

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