KEY WEST, FL—Florida Keys Community College held its first Scholarship Donor Appreciation Dinner on Friday, October 5th at the College’s Tennessee Williams Theater Grand Foyer. The event, which drew over 50 attendants, was co-hosted by FKCC President, Dr. Jill Landesberg-Boyle and Florida Keys Educational Foundation (FKEF) President, Stephanie Monsalvatge.

The evening included a beautifully set tropical dinner which was enjoyed by student scholarship recipients. Many of them had the chance to dine with their scholarship benefactors and express the personal gratitude.

Opening remarks were made by FKEF Executive Director Erika MacWilliams, who also coordinated the event. Monsalvatge spoke about the Foundation’s goal to alleviate the financial hardships faced by students who often juggle full-time classes, full-time jobs and family responsibilities. “FKCC offers an environment for success, and the students here today will go on to be the finest and most upstanding members of our community.” She pointed to FKCC
students in the audience such as Key West Police Officer Donny (or Donnie) Barrios, a recipient of the Russel Sullivan Scholarship for Law Enforcement Officers. “Our Foundation is able to help make dreams come true, and it’s all done through the passion of giving, and I want to thank our donors,” said Monsalvatge.

Several donors were recognized including Marathon Business & Professional Women’s Club, Ruth Sullivan King for establishing the Russel Sullivan Memorial Scholarship, the Lower Keys Medical Center Auxiliary, the Hemingway Look-Alike Society and Justin and Eileen Kawaler for the Evelyn Kawaler Memorial Scholarship and Student Ambassador Scholarship.

FKCC staff and program directors made remarks in appreciation of the donors, but the highlight of the evening was the moving speeches made by two student scholarship recipients: Christine Bellido and Alexandra Batey.

Batey, a recipient of the Hemingway Look-Alike Society Scholarship with a 4.0 grade point average, delivered a speech written in prose which reverberated “Less time spent working, and more time spent studying, all thanks to the great generosity of FKCC donors. Thanks for giving me this gift.”

Bellido, whose parents attended the event, spoke movingly about her personal experience at FKCC. She recalled her childhood and the times she walked the halls holding her mother’s hand, and being in awe of the college. “I knew early on that I want to be like my mother and go to college, but I didn’t know how it would be possible,” she said. “With this scholarship, my dreams are now coming true, and I can become what I wanted to be. I want to thank the donors from the bottom of my heart, and Mom, I love you,” her voice cracked.

The evening ended with closing remarks by Dr. Landesberg-Boyle, who was at a loss for words, still moved by the heart-felt words expressed by the students. “Wow! And these students said that they were not as good of speakers as we are? I am so impressed, and so proud of all of them. Thank you donors for making their dreams come true.”