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Colleges inspired by homebuilders' donations

By Tom Harlan

Donations of \$102 million from area home developers to two local universities have sparked a potential new development boom among eager university fundraisers.

The Miami Dade College Foundation is pursuing the development community after watching widespread development across Miami-Dade County, said spokesman Juan Mendieta.

"We feel there's potential there," he said. "It's a segment of the private sector we're looking at more actively."

Last month, the family of Lennar founder Leonard M. Miller donated \$100 million and South Florida developer Sergio Pino contributed \$2 million to programs at the University of Miami and Florida International University, respectively.

The University of Miami School of Medicine, which was renamed for Mr. Miller, is to use the funds to establish professorships and meet needs determined by school officials.

Florida International University's Global Entrepreneurship Center, which focuses on family businesses and the development of South Florida business ventures, is to be renamed the Eugenio Pino and Family Global Entrepreneurship Center after Mr. Pino's father.

Howard Lipman, FIU vice president of university advancement and executive director of the FIU Foundation, said developers like Mr. Pino are typically generous individuals who understand that a community needs higher education to flourish.

Developers became successful building homes so they want to provide for those communities and see them thrive, he said.

The booming development community is in position to make philanthropic gifts, said Sergio Gonzalez, vice president for advancement at the University of Miami. The university targets various industries when seeking donations from the private sector for its capital campaign, he said.

Donors contribute for reasons that aren't linked to business interests, Mr. Gonzalez said. For example, he said, many, like the Miller family, are interested in helping the school of medicine find cures for diseases or enhance health care in the community.

Mr. Pino, chairman and CEO of Century Homebuilders, said he made his donation to thank his father for his sacrifices and build up the university's entrepreneurship program. He said he hopes his family's contribution sets an example for other successful businesspeople such as developers who have had enormous success over the past three to four years.

The university needs the private sector's support for facilities such as a new medical school, he said, and scholarships for minority students who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to attend college.

To encourage their participation, Mr. Pino is to be co-chairman of an FIU foundation committee to raise money from builders and contractors.

"FIU is an engine of the community," he said. "Not everyone can give \$2 million. But no donation is too small."

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