



WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

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Will County Launches \$10 Million Scholarship Program to Boost Teaching and Nursing Recruitment

Will County Heroes scholarship program powered by ARPA funds

WILL COUNTY – Will County officially launched the “Will County Heroes” scholarship program today to support students seeking careers in teaching and nursing. The County is investing \$10 million in American Rescue Plan (ARPA) dollars to increase recruitment in these high-demand fields and incentivize future graduates to work in Will County.

“Will County is proud to be empowering the next generation of heroes within our schools and hospitals,” said **County Executive Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant**. “By working with partners throughout the county, we are supporting both quality education and long-term career success for students. I urge students to consider this scholarship opportunity as they plan for their future.”

Will County allocated \$2.5 million to each higher education partner to implement the scholarship grant: Governors State University, Joliet Junior College, Lewis University, and University of St. Francis. Eligible students at each institution can receive \$2,500 per semester or \$5,000 an academic year to support their pursuit of a teaching or nursing degree.

“Governors State University is excited to join Lewis University, University of St. Francis, and Joliet Junior College in the partnership that has been created to increase the workforce supply of teachers and nurses that will serve the Will County residential and business community,” said **Dr. Cheryl Green, President of Governors State University**. “This innovative collaboration serves as a model for institutions seeking to enhance the diverse needs of the local economy. We are grateful to Will County for their investment in the future of our students and the emerging workforce.”

A key goal of the program is to incentivize teaching and nursing graduates to grow their career in Will County. The program will aim to create an active pipeline to employers throughout the county after they graduate. The pipeline partners will support students as they grow their career after graduation, connecting them with a working environment that will foster positive career development.

Ascension St. Joseph and Silver Cross Hospital will act as the inaugural pipeline partners for nursing students. The Will County Center for Economic Development and Workforce Center of Will County will also support the development of career pipelines.



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"This is a collaborative plan with a shared vision and JJC is proud to partner with our peer institutions to make it happen," said **Dr. Clyne Namuo, President of Joliet Junior College**. "Through this initiative, we will create intentional pathways and meaningful teaching and nursing career opportunities for our residents. This is a unique opportunity and we are grateful for the County's investment in this work."

Will County Heroes aims to address shortages in the teaching and nursing profession, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible students include those pursuing teacher certification for elementary education, special education, and secondary education, along with students interested in becoming a Registered Nurse, either through a Bachelor of Science in Nursing or an Associates Degree in Nursing.

"Will County has made a bold and innovative investment in the future of the county through the Teaching and Nursing Grant program," said **Dr. David Livingston, President of Lewis University**. "The shortage of nurses and teachers in the region is a genuine challenge to our county and our state."

Will County has been allocated \$134.1 million in ARPA funding as part of the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. The Will County Board approved the \$10 million investment in scholarships as part of a \$23.5 million allocation into countywide economic development. All ARPA funding must be spent by Fall 2026.

"The University of St. Francis is privileged to support this strategic and visionary investment by Will County to address the critical demand for teachers and nurses to meet our present and future needs," said **Arvid C. Johnson, President of University of St. Francis**. We are proud to join with our higher-education partners – at JJC, Lewis, and Governor's State – in bringing this vision to reality in a way that will positively impact the county for years, if not decades, to come."

Students can apply for the Will County Heroes scholarship at their respective college or university. A full listing of program contacts for applications can be found at www.willcountyillinois.org/heroes.

Additional Support for Will County Heroes:

"Investments in our higher education institutions are the seeds we need to plant in order to ensure the growth of a diverse and continuous workforce in two of the most important but often under-funded careers. I am proud to be in favor of a much-needed scholarship program for teachers and



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nurses and can't wait to see the impact it has over the next few years for Will County.” - **Natalie Coleman, Ed.D, Will County Board Member, District 7**

“Over the course of the last few years healthcare and education have been negatively impacted. It is my hope that the ARPA Teaching and Nursing grant will attract people to enter into these professions. As a teacher myself, I feel we need educators who want to partner with parents and focus on the academic needs of students. This grant will help give people an opportunity to help further their education in healthcare or education.” - **Katie Deane-Schlottman, Will County Board Member, District 1**

“We're delighted to partner with Will County, the Center for Economic Development, Workforce Services, and our higher education partners on this important initiative to help students pay for critical nursing training while working in Will County. This project personifies the spirit of Will County: collaboration, diligence, and drive for continuous improvement and excellence.” - **Ruth Colby, President and Chief Executive Officer of Silver Cross Hospital.**

"Our hospital is deeply committed to the health and well-being of the communities we are privileged to serve. In doing so it is incumbent on us to also contribute to the growth and stability of our community through support of clinical education and training programs in partnership with local higher education institutions. Preparing future nurses from our community to serve our community benefits us all.” - **Chris Shride, President of Ascension Saint Joseph - Joliet.**

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