

Big Thursday a big boost for college students

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It doesn't take a great deal of thinking to see these are not the best of times in Lancaster. Recently a longtime bypass restaurant closed its doors. Gas prices have soared since last year. As they say, we have to take the good with the bad. There has been some recent good that impacts our future.

Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc., recently presented checks of \$16,000 each to the University of South Carolina at Lancaster and Clemson University. The money is used for scholarships to deserving Lancaster County youth, who attend these schools.

The \$16,000 to each school represents the second-highest amount given to the schools from the Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc., scholarship program. The top figure came four years ago when \$17,500 was presented to each school.

"That's \$16,000 to each school to help the students," said Richard Patterson, the Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc., chairman. "That's wonderful and a big, big help. This is the second highest amount of money and it's in a bad, bad economy."

The money is raised through Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc., which includes a golf tournament, raffle and dinner during the week prior to the annual Carolina-Clemson football game on the last Saturday in November.

The Big Thursday theme comes from the early football games played between the rival Gamecocks and Tigers on the Thursday during state fair week in Columbia from 1896 to 1959.

In addition to the event, Patterson said a cornerstone corporate group, which includes Founders Federal Credit Union, Springs Memorial Hospital, Haile Gold Mine and the three area Rotary clubs – breakfast, noon and Indian Land – have stepped to the fore to support the scholarship program.

Patterson said the Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc., Scholarship program is also offering individuals and businesses an opportunity to join in the fundraising, pledging \$250 a year – \$5 a week for 50 weeks with two weeks off for vacation.

Patterson said the goal is to draw 100 pledges after having 29 in 2010.

"The \$250 pledge is ideal because it doesn't tie up all the money all the time," said Frank Ferguson, a Big Thursday scholarship supporter. "It's something you can work with to help a fine cause."

USCL Dean John Catalano is grateful for Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc., which sports a slogan of "funding higher education through community support."

"These people support their teams and schools, but what they really do is reach out to help these students," Catalano said. "They care about them."

They know they will likely play a vital role in making for a brighter future for Lancaster.