

## Scholarship to help FSU student from Pensacola

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When he starts school this fall at Florida State University, Nick Coria will have some extra help with his college expenses.

Coria, an honor graduate of Pensacola High School, recently received a \$2,800 scholarship, which will help with bills for housing on campus, he said.

He is one of 1,000 students around the nation to receive such a scholarship, from ThanksUSA, a nonprofit organization, established to help children and spouses in military families. His father serves in the Air Force.

The organization is the brainchild of two elementary school children, Rachel Okun, 10, and Kelsi Okun, 8, of McLean, Va., said Carolyn Ferek, a former Pensacola resident.

Ferek, who also helped form the group, said Rachel, a former student, and Kelsi, Rachel's younger sister, dreamed up the idea while on vacation with their parents in Idaho last August.

"They wanted to do more for the troops," said Ferek, a third-grade teacher in McLean, Va. "They wanted to thank them for giving us the freedom we have." The girls already were supporting the troops by sending care packages and letters, but they thought helping to provide an education for the families was important.

Friends, neighbors, the girls' parents and Ferek, 52, combined their efforts and approached the federal government which "awarded us almost \$4 million."

The project has since taken on a life of its own ?? with the girls and Ferek even appearing on the NBC's "Today Show" recently.

"We've raised some money," said Ferek, a University of Florida alumna. "Lots of organizations and private groups are giving us money -- some, as small as \$7 and as large as thousands of dollars."

In varying amounts, students can receive scholarship money in amounts of \$1,000 to \$5,000 based on needs, for enrollment at any college, technical or vocational schools. Application dates for the 2007 year scholarship are pending but Ferek said hopeful applicants can call or monitor the organization's Web site.

Coria is grateful for the scholarship.

"Lots of people think that military families are well off," Coria said. "When college comes around, it can be a financial burden."

As a way to continue support for the project, the group has also written a book full of treasure hunts, Ferek said.

Readers are invited to participate in the hunt and solve a puzzle in one of 12 chapters in the book. Get the correct answers and you could be the winner of a prize that could possibly set you on your way to London or even a Super Bowl game.

There's no set charge for the book, but Ferek, who now lives in Falls Church, Va., said people could make a donation, if they choose.