



Alan Horton:

Welcome and opening remarks.

Introduce Tyler.

Tyler Knight:

Thank you, Alan, for having us here at Moorings Park this evening. We have a small token of our appreciation for everything you have done and continue to do for Champions For Learning; it is a taste of 35 years of sweet success. **(Give Alan the Norman Love chocolates.)**

Thank you all for attending this reception tonight! My name is Tyler Knight, and I am the founding co-chair of the Champions For Learning Alumni Council. Before we dive in, I'd like to recognize the Champions For Learning



staff and current Board members who are here tonight. If you could please stand up? **(Stand up)** Thank you for all that you do!

Tonight, we extend our deepest thanks to all of you who are Champions For Learning's former Board of Directors for your careful and caring stewardship of our organization over the years. Tonight, we are here to celebrate the power of education and all of you who have shaped this organization's success, as well as the success of countless students and educators. Your leadership has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Former Board members, please stand at your seats so that we can recognize you. **(CLAP, A**



pause as Board members stand) Thank you for continuously embodying our mission.

Tonight, you will meet alumni who were encouraged to dream big; with the guidance, resources, and opportunities provided through Champions For Learning, we have accomplished incredible things. Tonight, you will meet alumni who are indebted for the opportunities afforded to them by Champions For Learning. Tonight, you will meet our Alumni Council and see how investments made years ago have paid off. You'll see how our programs have shaped, and with your help, will continue to shape Collier County and beyond.



The mission of Champions For Learning is incredibly complex. The bedrock for the learning experience begins in our Educator Programs, and our Student Programs removes barriers to education, paving the way for a prosperous future. Let's watch how Champions For Learning supports education in Collier County, and how the organization has grown over the last 35 years.

Play video.

When Champions For Learning reached out to me about forming an Alumni Council, I couldn't have been more excited. Giving back to the community has been a huge priority of mine, and what better way to do so than by helping



to steer the organization that provided so much support to me when I was a student. It is a privilege to be an active participant to invoke change that will benefit generations to come.

I graduated from Naples High School in 2017, and during my time as a student, I was enrolled in Take Stock in Children. Champions For Learning continues to engage students even after they graduate from high school in tailored programming specifically designed for those who are in college, a technical program, or beginning their careers. Champions For Learning set me on the path to be where I am today – Chief of Staff with Capital Wealth Advisors.



Like many of the students Champions For Learning serves, I was the first in my family to consider college. I didn't have the resources at home to help me submit applications, search for scholarships, or complete the FAFSA. I knew I wanted to work in business but didn't have a clue what it would take to get there. Because of Champions and my amazing mentor, and now colleague, Bill Benyon, I was able to put down each stepping-stone that led me down the path to success.

The Alumni Council is designed to provide insight, promote the work of Champions, and strengthen connections. As former students who experienced programming first-hand, we have unique vantage points to begin new



conversations and offer guidance. Our goal is to support the mission and advocate for students to ensure that Champions For Learning remains a local leader in the realm of educational excellence.

I am fortunate to pioneer this exciting work with my co-chair, Tien Nguyen and an amazing group of Alumni Council members, many of whom have joined us this evening. I would like to invite them to the front here with me so you can hear from them about the amazing work they are doing.

(Alumni Council members line up)



Tien Nguyen speaks: Hi everyone! My name is Tien Nguyen and I am a Naples High graduate, class of 2017, and a University of Florida alum with my Bachelor's in Business Administration and Master's in Fisheries and Aquatic Science. One memorable moment I've experienced with Champions For Learning was back in 2017 when I was awarded the Leaders 4 Life Scholarship at Night of Champions and my parents were surprised guests. That night, will forever be, one of the greatest in my life!

Janet Del-Valle speaks: Good evening, everyone, I am Janet Del-Valle, a proud Class of 2015 graduate of Golden Gate High School and a first-generation college student. I earned my Associate of Arts degree from Florida



SouthWestern State College, followed by a double bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and Legal Studies, with a minor in Anthropology, from Florida Gulf Coast University. Currently, I serve as an Administrative Specialist for the City of Naples Fire-Rescue Department, where I find great fulfillment in contributing to public service. The mentorship of Mary-Margaret Sampson played an instrumental role in my journey, and I am deeply grateful for her guidance. One of the highlights of my experience with the Champions Program was attending the Night for Champions event, a fundraiser that significantly supports education in Collier County.

Gabriela Caballero speaks: My name is Gabriela Caballero. I graduated from Golden Gate High School in 2014 and went on to earn a bachelor's in Business Management and Marketing from Florida Gulf Coast University. I currently work for a Chicago-based agency specializing in Digital Marketing. My mentor, Judith Dawson, was a tremendous support during my teenage years, and I continue to stay in touch with her to this day. She has been the most memorable part of my journey with Take Stock in Children, along with the invaluable support from other Champions For Learning staff and volunteers, who helped boost my confidence and broaden my knowledge as I pursued higher education in the United States.

Stevie St. Tulus speaks: Good evening everyone.

My name is Stevie St Tulus. I graduated high school as a tri-enrolled student attending Lorenzo Walker Technical High School, Lorenzo Walker Technical College, and Florida Southwestern State College. Alongside my high school diploma, I graduated with my Practical Nursing certification and my associate's degree at the age of 17. From there I graduated from Florida State University with my B.S. in Nursing.

I am now actively studying to take my Boards Examination to earn my RN License. I then plan on working as a Pediatric ICU Registered Nurse, and with that experience I will continue my education and pursue my future career as a Family Nurse Practitioner.

Being a part of Champions For Learning has been both a learning experience and an eye-opener. As a student in the program, I was introduced to the staff and matched with my mentor Paul Kardon. I can whole-heartedly say that their support does not only consist of people in the program, but also the students that have graduated throughout the program as well.

In my first few months of college, I didn't have a car at the time so getting to work in an entirely new city was going to be challenging, but Champions For Learning gifted a few students bicycles. It wasn't a Tesla, but it helped me get around quicker and easier than walking would

be. I was also one of the recipients of the laptops that they were able to provide for us. I was consistently being checked on and sent motivational quotes. One day I was even contacted by a staff member who traveled to my university to surprise me with a shopping spree to collect cleaning products, groceries, and other essentials. I was speechless when the individual divulged to me that the staff of Champions For Learning would always be in my corner.

Joining the Alumni Council, I thrive to give that support back to the community of people who have such bright futures that may not have the support to push them to succeed.



Oliver Cuevas-Salinas speaks: My name is Oliver Salinas, and I am a manufacturing engineer at Arthrex, Inc. While working full-time, I am also enrolled in the MBA Program at FGCU with a concentration in Data Analytics. I graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University with a B.S. in Bioengineering and minor in Chemistry. I graduated from Golden Gate High School in 2011. My mentor was Morton Platt. A memorable and defining moment for me was the Take Stock In Children program graduation ceremony at Bower Chapel at Moorings Park. I remember being nervous but also optimistic about the path ahead: college and the opportunity to succeed.



Tyler Knight:

This organization doesn't just create opportunities; it creates ripple effects. Every student supported by Champions For Learning has the potential to change their family, their community, and the world. When you invest in education, you are investing in people. You are investing in their hopes and dreams. You are investing in their success, which translates to the success of so many others, and lays the foundation for a vibrant and healthy community.

To everyone in this room, I'm asking you to join me in continuing this legacy of hope, opportunity, and empowerment. Let's work together to ensure that Champions For Learning

can keep transforming lives one student, one family, and one community at a time.

Now, I can imagine you have many questions for us! To get the conversation started, I will ask a few questions to our alumni, and encourage you to continue the conversations throughout the evening.

Q&A:

Let's begin.

Tyler - Q1: Stevie, Are you still in touch with your mentor?

Stevie - A1: Yes I am still in contact with my mentor. I actually went to lunch with Paul and his family last month. The relationship my mentor and I have constructed is something I will never

want to leave behind. As a first-generation graduate, the road that led me here was not easy. The responsibility of keeping my family balanced in terms of balancing bank accounts, budgeting rent, applying for government assistance, taking care of my siblings, etc. All fell on me. On top of all that there were some domestic violence incidents that took place, causing me to truly believe there was never going to be more to my story. The overwhelming feeling that I would be doing my family a disservice by pursuing a future was daunting. Although academically I was seen as a sure bet to get into college with a GPA of 5.6 and over 400 community service hours, mentally I felt like I was living a double life. Paul was always understanding, and he never ran out of

wisdom to provide me. He challenged me and provided me with the push I needed to prioritize myself when the time came. Before graduating from the Champions For Learning program, Paul gifted me with a book “Oh, the places you’ll go” by Dr. Seuss, a challenging read...but the book simply reminded me everything that Paul reinforced in me. He reminded me of the confidence that I forget I have, to be able to push through and achieve any goal I set my sights toward.

Tyler – Q2: Gabriela, Why did you join the Champions program?

Gabriela – A2: To answer this question, I need to share a little bit about my background so you

can understand why I joined the Take Stock in Children program. As an immigrant, there are many goals you hope to achieve when you arrive in the United States. At first, it's all about securing basic needs like food and housing.

When I arrived nearly 15 years ago from Cuba, I knew this country had more to offer beyond just the essential needs. My biggest goal was to ensure my parents never regretted their decision to leave everything behind for a better life. I wanted to be able to look at my family and say with all confidence, "We made it." At that point, I knew I would pursue higher education. After all, I had watched my parents study throughout much of their adult lives. So when Champions for Learning reached out to me through my high school, I saw it as a sign. I

had a dream to fulfill, and I was ready to seize any opportunity that came my way. And that's why I joined the Take Stock in Children program—to achieve the American Dream and to make my family and myself proud.

Tyler – Q3: Tien, What made you stay in Collier County?

Tien – A3: The reason why I wanted to stay in Collier County after I graduated from college was because of my family and the amount of opportunities here . I currently help my parents run their nail salon business from inventory management to marketing. I also plan to start my own sustainable fish farm in Southwest Florida alongside a tiny house community in the next 3 years. I genuinely believe I live in one of

the most blessed cities in the world and the connections I have made so far are crucial to my success and endeavors.

Tyler – Q4: Oliver, Why did you decide to join the Alumni Council?

Oliver – A4: I joined the Alumni Council because I am grateful to the Champions for Learning (Take Stock In Children) program, along with its staff, volunteers, and donors, for supporting me in my pursuit of higher education. Their contributions have significantly shaped who I am and where I am today. Through my involvement in the Alumni Council, I aim to give back by promoting its mission to facilitate student achievement, raise awareness of



positive outcomes, and highlight the long-lasting impact it has on students, their families, and their communities.

Tyler Knight:

Thank you all for your thoughtful responses.

Now, I'd like to leave you with our President and CEO, Barbara Evans to conclude our program tonight.

Barbara Evans:

Thank you, Tyler! This is the power of education coming full circle.



The beauty and the power of education is that it is filled with infinite possibilities. Education is everything – it opens doors, breaks barriers and creates opportunities. It is the great equalizer that allows anyone, regardless of background, to achieve greatness.

Folks, we could not have done this work without you. I hope you are proud to see the results of your hard work while on our Board. As you know, our work is a long game. It's a marathon, and not a sprint. Your work on the Board of Champions For Learning was a long-term investment that has transformed the individual lives of our students and educators, and it also transformed our schools, our neighborhoods, and our entire community to be more



prosperous today, tomorrow, and for years to come.

Our Alumni Council is the fruit of your labor. As Benjamin Franklin once stated: “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” I invite you to think back, with pride, to your years of service.

I would love for you to join us to honor Collier County educators for the tremendous impact they are making on our students and the teaching profession at the Golden Apple Celebration of Teachers on Saturday, April 26th at the Naples United Church of Christ. This is a free, community-wide event and we ask that you visit our website to RSVP.



I would also like to invite you to our annual Countdown to Cap and Gown Celebration, where we will celebrate the graduating class of 2025, on Saturday, May 10th at Florida Gulf Coast University's Alico Arena. This free event will showcase the many accomplishments of our senior students and send them off on the next chapter of their lives with thundering applause.

Together we are changing lives and shaping futures! Thank you for being with us tonight, and thank you for your work on our Board. Here's to a future where hopes and dreams are realized through the power of education!