

Media Contact:

Alissa Hudak, Communications & Engagement Manager

Alissa.hudak@uwcollierkeys.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 14, 2024

UWCK Announces 2024 Marine Science Educational Advancement Scholarship Recipients

Monroe County – The United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) is thrilled to announce the recipients of the 2024 Marine Science Educational Advancement Scholarships. **This year, \$28,000 in scholarships have been awarded to six outstanding students:** Kristen Szpak (University of South Florida), Sofia Veliz (College of the Florida Keys), Robert Saylor (College of the Florida Keys), Kara Norman (College of the Florida Keys), Channing Gauffillet (University of Florida), and Iona Holmquist (Tallahassee Community College and Florida State University). Since 2022, nearly \$70,000 has been awarded to support the academic pursuits of Monroe County residents.

In February 2020, UWCK announced a transformative \$3.5 million grant from the United Arab Emirates to fund cutting-edge and innovative projects in reef restoration and education. It includes the UWCK-UAE Marine Science Educational Advancement Scholarship, supporting Monroe County residents in pursuing higher education in a marine science and/or marine technology related field. A Scholarship Committee reviewed the applicants, considering educational achievement, career objectives, school activities, references, and financial need. Scholarships may be used for tuition, books and materials, and/or room and board expenses, and are paid directly to the institution.

Marine Science Educational Advancement Scholarship Recipient Quotes:

Robert Saylor (College of the Florida Keys): “In the dive industry, I witnessed the bleaching event last year firsthand, which motivated me to return to school and complete my degree. I’m pursuing a degree in marine resource management, and this scholarship from the United Way is making it possible.”

Kara Norman (College of the Florida Keys): “This scholarship allows me to focus more on my bachelor’s program in marine resource management. I envision a future working underwater, contributing to coral and habitat restoration both locally and globally.”

Kristen Szpak (University of South Florida): “My background in biology and education led me to work at a marine science camp, igniting my passion for marine science. Now, I’m pursuing my PhD. Our economy and ecological health depend on coral reefs, and educating future environmental stewards is vital.”

UWCK is proud to support these dedicated students as they pursue their educational and career goals in marine science and technology, contributing to the preservation and restoration of marine ecosystems. View a video message from our scholarship recipients [here](#).

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About United Way of Collier and the Keys:

United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the education, health, and economic mobility of our neighbors in Collier and Monroe Counties. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative efforts, UWCK addresses critical social issues and works towards driving positive, sustainable change to build stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities.



I hope to be able to finish my Bachelor's now within the next year because I am able to focus full-time on my courses.

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