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Thea Scholarships attain \$2.5M to tap

by [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) | July 23, 2015 at 3:33 a.m.

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Thea Foundation Executive Director Paul Leopoulos (center) and board President Gayla Jungmeyer celebrate after receiving a \$500,000 matching-grant check toward the foundation's scholarship endowment from Windgate Charitable Foundation Executive Director John Brown III (right) on Wednesday in North Little Rock. - Photo by Benjamin Krain

Paul Leopoulos, executive director of the Thea Foundation, couldn't help but smile when he told those present at the foundation's North Little Rock office Wednesday that the nonprofit organization had fully funded the \$2 million endowment campaign it began two years ago.



Photo by Benjamin Krain

Windgate Charitable Foundation Executive Director John Brown III announces a \$500,000 matching grant for the Thea Foundation on Wednesday at the Thea Foundation's North Little Rock office, which funds scholarships for students interested in art.

The endowment will provide a permanent source of financial support to the Thea Scholarships -- the foundation's longest-running program -- and increase scholarship amounts and categories, Leopoulos said.

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Because the Thea Foundation's \$2 million campaign goal was met within a two-year timeline, John Brown III, the executive director of the Windgate Charitable Foundation, presented a \$500,000 matching-grant check to Leopoulos; his wife, Linda Leopoulos, who is the Thea Foundation's co-director; and its president, Gayla Jungmeyer.

"Creativity is something that's in all of us, it's something we can all participate in," Brown said before handing over the check at the Wednesday news conference.

Brown said the endowment will give wings to the dreams of students as it did for Sam Clark of Little Rock.

As a Parkview High School student, Clark had a passion for both the arts and physics.

In 2008, he won a Thea Scholarship for singing, but he majored in mechanical engineering at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. There, Clark was a member of the university choir and joined a vocal jazz ensemble.

When he graduated in 2012, he returned to Little Rock and works as an engineer for CenterPoint Energy.

Clark, who attended the news conference, said he's still a songwriter and is in a band.

Paul Leopoulos said, "Involvement in the arts impacts lives forever."

Started in 2002, the foundation's annual scholarship competition awards \$80,000 to 30 graduating high school seniors across the state for their accomplishments in performing arts, visual arts, film, slam poetry, fashion design and creative writing.

The students do not have to major in the arts in college, Leopoulos said, because participation in the arts is more about confidence-building than anything else.

This was the case for Leopoulos' daughter, Thea Leopoulos, who he said was an average high school student until she became involved in the arts, which helped improve her grades and confidence.

Paul Leopoulos said he realized this was not just a "Thea thing" but can be accomplished by most people.

So Leopoulos and his wife created the foundation in remembrance of Thea Leopoulos, who was killed in a car accident when she was 17, to carry her legacy forward by supporting youth.

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Two of Thea Leopoulos' paintings hang on a wall in the foundation's center: one of B.B. King and another of a colorful Statue of Liberty.

The arts give Paul and Linda Leopoulos peace of mind, Paul Leopoulos said, and they hope that the Thea Foundation can help give financial peace of mind to Arkansas high school students.

What began in 2002 with a few visual -arts scholarships awarded to students from North Little Rock High School, Thea Leopoulos' alma mater, has grown to having awarded more than \$2 million to 280 students since then.

Leopoulos said students from North Little Rock and Little Rock high schools have received a total of \$365,000 and \$550,000 in scholarships, respectively. The remaining \$1.2 million has been distributed to students throughout the state.

But Leopoulos was quick to add that although the \$2 million endowment goal has been met, the pursuit of further funding will not cease.

"We're not only advocates; we are doers," he said.

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