

## **Vocational success: Immokalee students bettering themselves with a little help from Immokalee Foundation**

Jennifer Whitis, Community Contributor

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When Edgar Robles-Garcia was an Immokalee High School senior, he joined Future Builders of America. By graduation, he had earned an internship at BCB Homes. Today, the 20-year-old has a job thanks to the Immokalee Foundation's Vocational Success program.

Following his internship, the company hired him, and he's been employed ever since. Currently he's working on a 12-home project in Naples as a superintendent in training.

"It's unbelievable," Robles-Garcia said. "I wouldn't have this position without the Immokalee Foundation."

Robles-Garcia is one of many success stories coming out of the Vocational Success program. Four years ago, the Immokalee Foundation, working in partnership with the Collier County School District, Collier Building Industry Association and Florida Home Builders Association, brought the Future Builders of America program to Immokalee. Students participate in vocational and on-the-job training, as well as summer internships with area businesses.

"The programs emphasize leadership, skills development and community service, preparing students for post-secondary training and vocational success. And the success stories rolling out of the program make everyone proud," said Elda Hernandez, vocational program manager for the Immokalee Foundation. "These opportunities change their lives."

David Turrubiardez worked in the fields harvesting crops including bell peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers and peanuts. For every 25 pound bucket of peanuts he picked, he earned \$3. Through the Immokalee Foundation and his membership with Future Builders of America he received a four-year full-tuition scholarship to Edison State College. Today, the college freshman continues to give back to his community and has high personal goals. The double major in business management and political science plans to be president of the United States.

Oscar Chavez participated in Future Builders of America and is a junior at the University of Tampa. He is a third year Army ROTC cadet who plans to be a second

lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He wouldn't have fulfilled those dreams without the Vocational Success program, he added.

Royel Saldivar learned a lot from Future Builders of America. He received a scholarship to Florida Gulf Coast University. The freshman is majoring in criminal forensics. The team building and practical skills he learned as a member of Future Builders of America will contribute to everything he plans to do in the future, he said.

Forty-five student-members participate in the Vocational Success program and work closely with the Collier Building Industry Association to learn appropriate skills. They have held internship positions at several local businesses, including Tri-City Electrical, Made in Rio, D. Garrett Construction, Salazar Machine & Steel, Kraft Construction Company, Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board and Immokalee Technical Center.

They also put their skills to work throughout the community. Last year the group helped build homes for Habitat for Humanity. They donated more than 1,600 volunteer hours.

AllThe Immokalee Foundation programs require students have "skin in the game" by performing community service. This is all part of its empowerment model for student growth. Their service is being recognized in high places — seven Future Builders of America students recently earned the Presidential Volunteer Service Award for logging more than 100 community service hours each.

Since 1991, the Immokalee Foundation has been building pathways to success for many of the children in Immokalee through a variety of programs that focus on mentorship, after-school activities, college scholarships, the development of vocational skills and incentives for educational growth. In 2009, the Immokalee Foundation served 2,700 children through its core programs.

The Immokalee Foundation offers a road map toward a brighter future. It helps manage seven core programs including Take Stock in Children, Vocational Success, College Success, Direct Scholarships, the First Tee of Naples/Collier Program in Immokalee, Immokalee Readers and Community Grants.

For more information, call (239) 430-9122 or visit [www.immokaleefoundation.org](http://www.immokaleefoundation.org).

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