

[Home](#) > [News](#) >

[Scholarships encourage next generation of scientists](#)

## Scholarships encourage next generation of scientists



Tim Hicks - Managing Editor

Allante Harrison, left, and Valerie Moody are this year's EnergySolutions scholarship recipients.

By Tim Hicks - Managing Editor

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[News](#)

### First Byline:

Tim Hicks - Managing Editor

They are two years from their graduation, yet professional people are already asking one group of high school students where they will be in the future.

The EnergySolutions Foundation, the college scholarship organization, awarded 22 sophomores from Georgia and South Carolina each with \$2,000 college scholarships.

Three students from Barnwell County were among the recipients: Valerie Moody of Barnwell High School; Allanté Harrison of Blackville-Hilda High and Christopher Harvey with Williston-Elko High.

The awards banquet was held May 21 at Newberry Hall in Aiken. The scholarship students were from high schools in the central Savannah River area.

"This is probably the neatest thing and the proudest thing that we do," said Mike Johnson, the president of the commercial facilities group for EnergySolutions.

The students can attend any college of their choice, as long as they pursue a degree in one of the following fields: biochemistry, biology, chemistry, ecology, engineering, environmental sciences, geology, geophysics, mathematics, meteorology or physics.

Harrison said he is looking at possibly pursuing a medical engineering degree once in college.

Harrison wrote his entrance essay for the scholarship on the topic and became more interested in it, he said.

"I'm expecting great things from him. He's only in the 10th grade but he's making straight A's so far," said Teresa Pope, the Blackville-Hilda school superintendent who attended the banquet.

Moody said she is interested in studying pharmacy.

"I want to go to Presbyterian College and by the time I go there, they will have a pharmacy program," she said.

The scholarship foundation was set up by EnergySolutions, the nuclear energy services company headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. EnergySolutions runs the low-level nuclear disposal facility in Barnwell County.

The foundation's purpose with the program is to raise up the next generation of scientists and engineers. The program is offered in the nine states that EnergySolutions has facilities.

"A few years ago, EnergySolutions notices a steep decline in the hard studies. We wanted to do something to stop that," said Pearl Wright, the executive director for the EnergySolutions Foundation.

Wright flew to South Carolina from the foundation's headquarters in Salt Lake, Utah to be a presenter at the South Carolina banquet.

"I fought to be the one who came here," she said. "I love it here."

Wright said she planned to take in some sight-seeing in Charleston while in the area.

Tim Dangerfield, the community outreach for EnergySolutions in South Carolina, said 22 of the 24 high schools in the CSRA participated this year. Last year the foundation awarded 24 scholarships to as many students.

Dangerfield said he did not know why two of the region's high schools didn't participate this year.

"This is the third year that we have done this - We look forward to seeing you as you continue your studies in college," he said.

The poor economic conditions recently have not endangered the funding of the scholarships because the foundation draws off the interest from the original \$3 million deposited some years ago to create the scholarship fund. It will be years before the company will need to replenish the fund, Wright said.

To be eligible for the scholarship, students must be in the 10th grade; maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale and be involved in complimentary extracurricular activities like athletics or academic teams like math clubs or science fairs. The students also must enter a bachelor degree program at an accredited university or junior college studying one of the approved majors.

The United States is 10th in the world for countries with the highest population with college degrees, having been passed by Japan and other nations, Wright said.

"You are doing something to improve this level," she told the students. "I applaud you for that."

During the banquet, the crowd of about 120 students, parents, school officials and EnergySolutions employees watched an EnergySolutions video on the benefits of having a hard science degree.

One fact brought out during the video was that in 1970, 90 percent of the doctorate degrees in math and science in the world were held by Americans. Now Americans only possess about 19 percent of these degrees.

Clyde Ward, a mentor for M'Aiken Magic, the countywide robotics program in Aiken County for elementary, middle and high school students, talked about how the program inspires many students to pursue higher education, often in engineering studies.

Ward cited a study which 50 percent of the students who were involved in school robotics programs went on to college.