

Big Thursday raises big bucks for USCL, Clemson

By Robert Howey

Sunday, March 4, 2012 at 7:00 am (Updated: March 4, 7:59 am)

Robert Howey

rhowey@thelancasternews.com

Richard Patterson, chairman of the Big Thursday of Lancaster, Inc. scholarship fund opened the annual check presentations Tuesday by giving CNN a pat on the back.

The news network created a local firestorm with its recent report on Lancaster.

"That was the biggest favor they could have ever done, as far as getting us to wake up and go to work to improve Lancaster," Patterson said.

Earlier this winter, prior to the S.C. Republican primary, CNN aired a story depicting Lancaster as a pathetic Southern town.

Patterson said the work of the Big Thursday Scholarship Committee, which raises scholarship funds for Lancaster students attending University of South Carolina Lancaster and Clemson University, reflects a different view of Lancaster.

The committee's work smashed the record for contributions to the scholarship fund, raising \$40,000 – \$20,000 to each school.

Since the Big Thursday Scholarship fund began in 2000, an estimated \$294,600 has been raised – \$147,300 to each school.

"People went to work knocking on doors and knocking on doors," Patterson said. "This committee kept on going and what we have is a record-breaker. Their hearts are Lancaster County students getting an education. By educating our students, we will improve Lancaster."

The funds were the result of the Big Thursday of Lancaster Inc. annual effort to boost scholarships for deserving Lancaster County youth.

The highlight of the event is the annual Big Thursday golf tournament and related events to support the scholarships. The tournament is held the third Thursday in November, the week before the annual South Carolina-Clemson football game on the last Saturday in November.

The Big Thursday theme comes from the early playing dates of the USC-Clemson football series, held from 1896 to 1959 during the week of the annual state fair in Columbia. After that, the two teams met on a home-and-home basis.

Patterson said a major player in the recent fundraising success is the pledge sponsorship program, which began with 29 sponsors in 2010 and increased to 40 in 2011.

Pledge sponsors, individuals and businesses, contribute \$5 a week for 50 weeks.

"If we could get the people of Lancaster who will donate \$5 a week for educating our Lancaster County students, we can and will make great strides in improving our quality of life in Lancaster County," Patterson said. "We give the pledge sponsors two weeks off for vacation, but the pledge must be in by the end of the year."

Patterson said the Big Thursday scholarship program also benefits from area corporate sponsors.

USCL Dean John Catalano is grateful for Big Thursday's support.

"This is about the students," Catalano said. "It's great for our students and great for Clemson students. A bunch of people in this community wouldn't be able to graduate from college without incredible depth."

Rodney Thomas, president of the Lancaster County Clemson Club, said he recently returned from a Clemson Alumni Council meeting and the work of the scholarship committee is baffling to that CU group.

"They can't believe Clemson and South Carolina people can work together," Thomas said. "One time a year we come together for something good. People can't understand what we do."

Thomas noted with the start of the 2012 fall semester, 15 Lancaster County students at Clemson will benefit from Big Thursday Scholarship funds.

Frankie Faile, a member of the scholarship committee, said Patterson provides the spark.

“Every successful organization has a burr,” Faile said. “Richard is our burr. He drives us.
“We have a great thing, a unique opportunity,” he said. “We give these students a chance.”
For details on the Big Thursday Scholarship program and how to make a pledge, call (803) 286-6800, or
write to Big Thursday, P.O. Box 1025, Lancaster, S.C., 29721.
Patterson said the committee is looking for volunteers.
“We really need volunteers to help us in some way,” Patterson said.

