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**FSU prof gives \$50,000 to Boys & Girls Clubs**

By Maureen Thompson  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

In a far northeastern corner of Leon County, at the Miccosukee Boys & Girls Club, a local version of the movie "Pay it Forward" was revealed at a press conference held Thursday, Sept. 21.

That's when Florida State University associate professor **Davis Houck** formally announced his five-year, \$50,000 scholarship contribution to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Big Bend.

The scholarship is named for **Raymond Fleming**, another FSU professor whom Houck considers a mentor and close friend.

Fleming was born into the Hough projects in Cleveland, Ohio and, despite his enormous intellectual gifts, formal academic training was beyond his means. He had generous mentors at several key points, however, including his best friend's father, John Francis Dugan, who paid Fleming's way to Notre Dame University in South Bend, Ind. Without this generous offer, Fleming, by his own admission, would've likely taken occasional classes at the local community college, at best.

Fleming ultimately earned his Ph.D. from Harvard and has been teaching at FSU since 1995. In 2000, Houck came to FSU, largely because of the advocacy of Fleming, who befriended him as a graduate student at Penn State.

Houck credited Fleming with inspiring him to give back to his community.

"Ray gives so much to his students and his fellow colleagues," said Houck, "many days staying late into the night writing reference letters and reviewing tenure files. He sets a personal example that I am proud to follow."

**By sheer chance**

Houck's involvement with the Boys & Girls clubs came about by accident.

"I thought I was attending a meeting about a literacy program," he said. "And about five minutes into the presentation, I realized the speaker was actually talking about Boys & Girls Clubs."

Houck was too polite to stand up and leave the meeting, and he soon found himself interested in what he was hearing. When the speaker indicated that the remote Miccosukee Boys & Girls Club was the one that most needed volunteers, Houck decided, almost on a whim, to get involved.

"I live in the Northeast anyway," he said. "So I thought, how much time could

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it take?"

Three years later, Houck is one of the Miccosukee Boys & Girls Club's most dedicated volunteers, even winning the Big Bend Boys & Girls Club's "Volunteer of the Year" award in 2005.

"It took me about 30 seconds to become friends with the kids on that first visit," he reminisces. Now Houck is typically at the club every Wednesday and Friday, tutoring and helping with homework from 3 to 4 p.m., and then organizing and participating in athletic events until parents arrive to pick up their kids. An ex-intercollegiate athlete, Houck says the kids help keep him feeling fit and young.

"These kids are so smart, but opportunities for higher education are not always presented to them," said Houck. He started taking some club members to FSU, showing them around campus and letting them sit in on some of his classes.

"It's amazing," he said. "Many of them had never seen Doak Campbell stadium other than on TV. They had no idea what opportunities were right in their backyard, through FSU, FAMU or TCC."


"The financial means to do this just sort of happened," Houck said. "I could have bought a bigger house or taken bigger vacations. But I'm more interested in active philanthropy and working towards the future."

### Money targets local kids

Houck plans to donate \$10,000 a year over the next five years, and he also will work to increase the funds by tapping acquaintances and Boys & Girls Club donors. Initially the plans are to keep the scholarships local, for students planning to attend FSU, FAMU or TCC. Currently there are no limits set on how many scholarships will be awarded; that depends on how many Boys & Girls Club members are eligible to apply in any given year.

**Buddy Streit**, president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Big Bend, also said the entire board is thrilled with the commitment Houck has made to local kids.

"Davis' giving of his time to our kids over the past few years has made a lasting impact on the lives of Miccosukee youth," he said. "His decision to give even more, in the form of real opportunities for higher education, sets a great example for all the citizens of Leon County. We are truly grateful for his generosity."

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