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A lasting legacy

WHEN SAM REDA, SR. GRADUATED from Pitt State in 1933, it was an incredible achievement: the son of an Italian immigrant coal miner, he was the first in his family to attend college, often hitching rides to Pittsburg from Scammon, and went on to build a successful career in teaching, accounting, and insurance.

Reda inspired generations of his family to pursue higher education — including daughter Gloria Reda Star (BA '62) and sons Sam (BBA '64) and Jack (BBA '72).

The brothers, who live in the Kansas City area, created the Reda Education Foundation two years ago to help first-generation students who faced barriers. It's already helped students get closer to the finish line of earning a degree.

Funding comes in part from an annual benefit fundraising event, "Broadway on the Plains," with the help of Jack's daughter, Angel Reda, a Broadway actress with many connections in the industry.

Among their first Reda Scholars at Pitt State: seven students in the Irene Ransom Bradley School of Nursing.

"We wanted to honor our father with a lasting legacy that would help transform lives just like his was," Jack said. "Dad was a trailblazer who broke the ice and whose children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, and cousins followed in his footsteps."

Jack and Sam returned to campus in April to meet with the scholars and learn about their educational experiences.

"You're ready for the next part of your career and you're a real testament," Sam told the students. "We're very proud of you."

Among them: Tharyn Lewis, who was in and out of the foster system with multiple guardianships and left at age 17, taking her 14-year-old brother with her. She has raised him ever since. Now starting her senior year, she assumed college was never something she would be able to do.

"I was thankful not only for the scholarship, but because Jack and Sam really took time to get

to know us. It has felt like I have a family member rooting for me."

Abby Robinson, whose father was incarcerated, helps provide for her mother and brother. She is starting her senior year and dreams of working in pediatrics.

Shelby Blythe, who became pregnant her freshman year, dropped out of college to become a single mother but was able to return as a Reda Scholar and graduated in May; she is now working as a cardiology nurse for a regional hospital.

"This scholarship meant the difference for me finishing school," she said.

The Foundation has added three students from the Crossland College of Technology for the fall semester and plans to add students from the Kelce College of Business in the near future.

"Our mission — we're not just about providing money, we're encouraging our students to succeed and staying connected to them," Jack said.