

'Like a Homecoming'

Lee College Foundation Gala Returns, Raises Nearly \$143,000 for Student Support

Jason Richie grew up in a family that didn't value education as a priority. But when Richie learned he was about to become a father, his attitude quickly changed. He left his past behind and enrolled at Lee College.

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"I took an internal assessment of my life and the world around me and realized the key to achieving my goals was to get an education," Richie told a crowd of more than 250 guests at the 35th annual Lee College Foundation Gala on Friday, Sept. 23.

Richie was the keynote speaker at the event, which raised \$142,860 through sponsorships, ticket sales, outside donations, as well as the silent and live auctions of the evening. The \$22,460 raised from both auctions will be directed toward the Student Resource and Advocacy Center (SRAC), which provides support for unmet basic needs to students, such as textbook assistance, food, emergency aid, and childcare services.



Jason Richie

Richie, a single father to a three-year-old daughter, is a direct beneficiary of the SRAC.

"We were able to provide Jason childcare assistance and a single-parent scholarship so he could fully focus on his studies," said Dr. Lynda Villanueva, Lee College president.

"Helping Lee College students like Jason stay on track to graduation and achieve their greatest potential is what events like the Foundation gala are about for me."

After a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the gala returned to Sylvan Beach Pavilion in LaPorte. Generations of donors and new donors were in attendance, and many said it felt like a homecoming.

"Everyone was thrilled to be there and just grateful to come together under one roof on behalf of the students," said Patti Ranzini, vice president of college advancement and executive director of the Lee College Foundation. "This gala is a time to recognize the legacy of support from our donors and honor their generous contributions and passion for education."

Richie, who himself went from being passive to passionate about education, is set to graduate from Lee in December with his *third* associate degree in analytical instrumentation and a 3.9 GPA. His two other degrees from the college are in electrical technology and instrumentation technology. He hopes to be in a position in the future where he can pay it forward and help a Lee College student like himself achieve the same success.

"Being a single father and finishing college is no easy task, but the support system and generous donors allowed me to accomplish my goals that in the past would have been deemed simply impossible," he shared. "Lee College helped me find solutions not excuses and these hard lessons learned through diligent study, hard work and dedication have already improved my life immensely."

[Learn more about the Lee College Foundation](#) and the services available through the [Student Resource and Advocacy Center](#).