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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Polk State College expands services in Northeast Polk at Ridge Community High School

Winter Haven, August 8, 2018 — Polk State College is expanding its services in Northeast Polk County at Ridge Community High School, where the College will increase its afternoon, evening, and weekend courses for adults seeking Associate in Arts degrees.

While Polk State partners with Polk County Public Schools to provide on-site dual enrollment at most high schools, the partnership with the Northeast-area school goes a step further to offer college courses for non-dual enrolled students.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) recently approved the College's request to offer the Associate in Arts degree program at Ridge Community High, where Polk State will expand its course offerings to make higher education more accessible to residents in the fastest growing region of the county.

“Paired with our fully online degree programs, more residents of Northeast Polk have the opportunity to earn their degrees without ever leaving their community,” Polk State President Angela Garcia Falconetti said. “Providing opportunities such as this is at the core of Polk State's mission to provide access to affordable, quality higher education to *all* residents of Polk County.”

In fall 2018, the site will offer nine classes in the afternoons and evenings, including literature, composition, math, psychology, and world religions courses. College administrators are working to determine additional courses to offer in spring 2019 and future semesters based on the needs of students.

Fall 2018 classes at Polk State start August 20, and open enrollment is currently underway. Polk State classes at Ridge Community High, which are 12-week courses, begin September 17. Prospective students may submit an online application to the College at www.polk.edu. Currently enrolled students may register through their PASSPORT accounts.

Polk State has offered courses at Ridge Community High since 2008, but the recent SACSCOC approval will allow the College to increase its services at the school.

“Polk County Public Schools is thrilled about the opportunity for students to earn their Associate in Arts degrees at Ridge Community High School,” Superintendent Jacqueline Byrd said. “As a school district, we are making great academic strides, and our graduation rate is now at a 10-year high. We are proud to be partnering with Polk State to offer our students a convenient option for continuing their education after they graduate from us. Education changes not only the individual student’s life, but our entire community. As a school district, we’re committed to ensuring academic opportunity and supporting academic achievement, and this partnership with Polk State is a prime example.”

From fall 2017 through spring 2018, the site served more than 300 Polk State students – nearly one-third who were not dual-enrolled high school students. Sixty-one percent of those who were not dual enrolled attended part time, and 63 percent were 21 or older, illustrating the College’s ability to serve nontraditional students who are balancing school with other responsibilities, such as jobs and raising families.

With Davenport and nearby Polk City being named two of the five fastest growing cities in Florida by the U.S. Census Bureau, Polk State’s presence in the Northeast part of the county is more important than ever. Ridge Community High sits between Davenport and Haines City, Polk County’s third most populous city.

“As Northeast Polk County continues to grow, access to higher education is crucial to ensure the best quality of life for our residents,” said Deric C. Feacher, City Manager of Haines City. “Haines City is moving forward at a rapid pace, and we are thrilled to have Polk State growing alongside the Northeast community.”

Cyndi Jantomaso, President and CEO of the Haines City Economic Development Council, explained that access to education has a positive effect on the growth of a region.

“The education available to build a strong workforce is one of the top business incentives we as economic developers can offer. Having a strong workforce is a major tool in the recruitment of companies to our area,” Jantomaso said. “Polk State’s investment and expansion in Northeast Polk County will contribute greatly to educating and training our workforce, which will in turn bring more businesses and better jobs to our area, thereby promoting higher per-capita earnings for our residents.”

On average, Polk State’s graduates earn wages that are 2.3 times higher than the average entry-level wage for Polk County, and 70 percent stay in right here Polk County.

“Our students go on to become highly-skilled members of our local workforce and the next leaders of our community,” Falconetti explained. “Polk State’s goal is to put college degrees in reach for everyone by bringing higher education closer to home for residents.”

“We are grateful to Ridge Community High School for its strong partnership and we are proud to serve the Northeast Polk community,” she added. “Together, *We are Polk!*”

About Polk State College

Located in Winter Haven, Florida, and established in 1964, Polk State College is a multi-campus institution serving more than 16,000 students with Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Science, Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees, as well as a wide range of certificate and workforce training options.

The College also operates three charter high schools. Polk State’s advantages include small class sizes; hands-on learning; dedicated faculty; day and night classes; online options; affordable tuition; excellent financial aid; and a diverse community and vibrant student life, including fine arts opportunities, clubs, and intercollegiate athletics.