

FirstOntario Credit Union supports student success through new scholarship and Nourishing Minds



Caption: Volunteers from FirstOntario Credit Union Jim Mancuso, Jennifer McEachern, Kelly Taylor-McNeil and Christine Susa, present NC Development Officer Emily O'Connor (left) and NCSAC President Dipal Patel (right) with a donation to the Together campaign. NC student Kaityn Curik (second from right) also appears.

Students passionate about volunteering and community engagement will soon have new opportunities for recognition and support.

[FirstOntario Credit Union](#) is contributing \$50,000 to promote student success, foster volunteerism and community engagement, and enhance food security at Niagara College. The multi-year donation will establish a new endowed scholarship and enhance the [Nourishing Minds Fund](#), two initiatives that directly benefit students.

"We are proud of our strong partnership with FirstOntario Credit Union, whose leadership in volunteerism and community engagement aligns perfectly with our values at Niagara College," said Gord Arbeau, Vice President, Advancement "This generous gift will provide much-needed financial support for our students while also encouraging a culture of giving back and serving our community."

Over two years, \$25,000 will be allocated to a new endowed student award and the remaining \$25,000 will be directed toward the Nourishing Minds Fund. The significant contribution is part of the College's broader [Together](#) campaign, which aims to support student development, wellbeing, and community involvement.

The new **FirstOntario Credit Union Scholarship** will recognize students dedicated to volunteerism and community engagement. Inspired by FirstOntario's [Blue Wave Volunteers](#), a dedicated group of employees who have contributed over 15,000 volunteer hours to date, the scholarship will reward students making a meaningful impact in our communities.

"At FirstOntario, we are dedicated to tackling societal challenges such as food insecurity and youth health and wellness, which is why we are pleased to establish this ongoing endowment at Niagara College," said Joanne Battaglia, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Communications & Community Partnerships at FirstOntario Credit Union. "We have deep roots in Niagara, spanning 85 years, and are home to many of our members and employees. We greatly appreciate the contributions that Niagara College and its students make to the ongoing vibrancy of our region."

Consideration will be given to students who demonstrate a history of volunteer work, leadership in community initiatives, and a passion for giving back – all qualities that reflect FirstOntario's commitment to fostering a culture of service and civic engagement. Applications for the new FirstOntario Credit Union Scholarship will open in 2027.



Caption: Blue Wave volunteers from FirstOntario Credit Union attend NCSAC's Rise and Shine breakfast at the Daniel J. Patterson Campus in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

FirstOntario has been a steadfast supporter of NC student success for close to 30 years, including impactful contributions to the annual [Niagara College Gala](#) and [Golf Classic](#). Both fundraising events benefit students and athletes through scholarships, bursaries, and equipment purchases to ensure they have the tools and resources they need to succeed. Since 2013, the FirstOntario Credit Union Business Scholarship has also directly supported more than 25 student leaders in [community services programs](#).

FirstOntario is additionally helping Niagara College's Student Administrative Council (NCSAC) combat food insecurity on campus through the [Nourishing Minds Fund](#). Established in 2015 to provide students with access to healthy food options on a regular basis, Nourishing Minds helps thousands of students every year through its grocery gift card and Rise and Shine breakfast programs.

“We know that a lack of consistent access to food profoundly impacts students' health and ability to succeed. The Nourishing Minds Fund represents an ideal partnership and is a great resource that we are happy to support,” said Battaglia.



Caption: Students line up on Giving Tuesday 2024 for a hot breakfast served by NCSAC and Blue Wave volunteers from FirstOntario Credit Union

For [Giving Tuesday 2024](#) on December 3, a group of FirstOntario's dedicated Blue Wave volunteers visited the Daniel J. Patterson Campus to lend their hands and hearts to serve a hot breakfast to hundreds of students relying on these meals to start their day with energy and focus.

"It's such a relief to know that I can grab something quick and nutritious before class. It's one less thing to worry about when I'm trying to balance everything else in my day," said student Carmen R., who has used the free breakfast program a few times.

FirstOntario's commitment to being NC's Giving Tuesday [partner](#) for the next two years means the \$25,000 pledge will help address the immediate needs of students facing food insecurity.

"I'm proud to be a Blue Wave volunteer and support the many great initiatives that happen throughout our region," said Kelly Taylor-McNeil, Branch Manager, Fourth Avenue, St. Catharines, FirstOntario Credit Union. "I have a particular interest in supporting students and seeing first-hand the positive difference this program makes and our credit union's support of it, is heartwarming."

“We are grateful that FirstOntario sets such a powerful example for other community partners to get involved in supporting students in meaningful ways,” said Shannon Boeckner, Senior Director, Development and Donor Stewardship. “We know this gift to our Together campaign will create a lasting impact on our students, alumni, and the wider community.”

The College’s [Together](#) campaign is actively raising funds to support student success. In addition to addressing the crises in healthcare and skilled trades, the multi-year \$50 million fundraising campaign also seeks to make college education more accessible, create equitable and diverse learning environments, equip graduates with cultural awareness and global competencies, and foster research, creativity, and innovation to help close Canada’s productivity gap.

Community partners and donors are invited to learn more about the important priorities of the Together campaign by visiting niagaracollege.ca/together. Discover how you can support this and other worthwhile initiatives by getting involved.