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Three Val Verde Graduates Receive \$1,000 Scholarships



Val Verde High School graduates Maria Cruz and Sonia Arellano received \$1,000 scholarships to continue their studies June 12 during the Perris City Council meeting. The winners are pictured with Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona, City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, Mayor Michael Vargas, City Engineer and scholarship provider Habib Motlagh, City Councilwoman Tonya Burke and City Councilman David Starr Rabb.

Media Contact

Joe Vargo
Public Information Officer
951-943-6100
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Three graduates of Val Verde High School received \$1,000 scholarships to continue their education June 12 during the Perris City Council meeting.

The awards were presented by City Engineer Habib Motlagh and his company, Tri-Lake Consultants. Motlagh is an immigrant from Iran who found success in the City of Perris and, as a way to thank the community, has funded numerous scholarships to graduates pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) degrees or certifications.

"It makes me very happy that I am able to help three young students a little bit as they further their education," Motlagh said. "I hope that one day, one or all of them will come back to Perris and continue to add to the greatness of this fine community."

Val Verde High School is the continuation school for the Val Verde Unified School District.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas, who served for years as a school district trustee, said the campus holds a special place in his heart.

"Sometimes students just need a little motivation, a pat on the back, to encourage them to finish high school and move on to college and get that degree," Vargas said. "I am grateful to Mr. Motlagh. His commitment to this community is beyond words."

The Val Verde scholarship winners are Sonia Arellano, who wants to become a veterinarian; Maria Cruz, who plans to become a pharmacy technician and later an FBI agent and Wendy Gonzalez Gomez, who has aspirations to become a nurse.

Arellano and Cruz, both 17, attended the City Council meeting. Gomez was unable to attend.

Arellano will begin her college education at Moreno Valley College, where she plans to complete her general education requirements before choosing a four-year college to begin her quest to become a veterinarian. Arellano said she's gone through rough patches as a teen-ager and credits her Yorkie, Luna, with providing the companionship and unconditional love that to overcome life's challenges.

Arellano holds down a summer job to help with expenses. The Tri-Lake scholarship will help out significantly when she enters college.

"I feel honored and privileged to earn this award," she said.

Her hobbies include drawing. Her favorite subjects: pets.

Cruz already works in a pharmacy as a customer relations employee, so she's getting real-world experience in her next chosen field. She will attend Moreno Valley College as she pursues her initial career as a certified pharmacy technician, which will allow her to fill prescriptions. From there, she wants to change career paths to criminal justice, with the ultimate goal of working for the FBI.

Cruz comes from a family of modest means, so the scholarship "means a lot."

"I don't have to work so I can focus all my attention on my studies," she said.

Her favorite subject is math. In her spare time, Cruz likes to spend time with her nephews, taking them to movies and trampoline parks.



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101 N. D Street
Perris, CA 92570

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