

## Memorial to a friend, tribute to a future

Dallas: Woodrow senior earns scholarship named for '04 gunshot victim

12:00 AM CDT on Saturday, May 13, 2006

By ELIZABETH LANGTON / The Dallas Morning News

Cesar Ortiz is looking at a bright future.



CLICK IMAGE  
TO ENLARGE

JIM MAHONEY/DMN

Cesar Ortiz, who plans to use his \$5,000 scholarship to study at Cedar Valley College in Lancaster, will start with several credits in hand. His friend Gustavo Ipiña, for whom the award is named, died at 17 when a motorist fired into a van in which he was a passenger.

He graduates from high school in one week. He'll start college in the fall with several credits already under his belt. He plans to become a psychologist.

Two years ago, Cesar's friend Gustavo Ipiña was headed down a similar path. Then a single bullet ended the 17-year-old's life and his aspiration to be the first in his family to attend college.

But the dreams of Cesar and Gustavo remain linked. Last week, Cesar became the first recipient of the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship at Woodrow Wilson High School in Old East Dallas.

"It's weird. I didn't expect it," Cesar said. "But it's kind of exciting because he was my friend.

"He was smart, dedicated – a good guy. He loved his mother. He was special."

Taly Haffar, the Dallas County prosecutor who handled the case against Gustavo's killer, established the scholarship fund.

"Gustavo had an incredible future in front of him," Mr. Haffar said. "To see it go unfulfilled really got to me."

Gustavo died Aug. 9, 2004, when a motorist fired into a van in which he was a passenger during a traffic altercation. Gustavo was shot in the head and died in his brother's arms, Mr. Haffar said.

The loss devastated Gustavo's family as well as his teachers and friends at Woodrow, teacher Majorie Shaw said.

"This wasn't some nameless kid that no one cared about," she said. "A lot of people cared about him. He was an important kid."

"If you were a parent, he was the kind of kid you hoped your child would hang out with."

The motorist, 28-year-old Richard Arechiga III, pleaded guilty to manslaughter in exchange for a 10-year prison sentence.

Gustavo's parents, Faustino and Maria Rosa Ipiña, agreed to the plea deal because they feared that a probation-eligible Mr. Arechiga might go free, Mr. Haffar said.

"It didn't sit well with me, but I wanted to respect their wishes," he said. "It sounds cliché, but I really couldn't sleep after it."

So Mr. Haffar decided to honor Gustavo's memory with a scholarship. Fellow prosecutor Erin Hendricks and Woodrow officials helped establish a fund, and they raised nearly \$9,000.

"We're so lucky that we got Taly assigned to Gustavo's case," Ms. Shaw said. "I don't think this would have happened if we had gotten anyone else."

Recipients must be enrolled in the English-as-a-second-language program at Woodrow and accepted at an accredited college. They also must exhibit traits ascribed to Gustavo: spirit, joy and a strong work ethic.

Woodrow teachers narrowed the applicants to four finalists. Mr. Haffar and Ms. Hendricks interviewed those and selected the winner.

"It was a really difficult decision," Mr. Haffar said. "They all work. They all help their families. They are all good students. They all have these very high ideals. We wanted to combine someone with the most potential we could find and who has some of Gustavo's traits."

"Cesar has a quiet confidence about him. He sees the big picture. He has a plan. These are great traits that he and Gustavo shared."

Cesar plans to use his \$5,000 award to study at Cedar Valley College in Lancaster. Mr. Haffar hopes to see the scholarship grow to fund four years of college for a student.

E-mail [elangton@dallasnews.com](mailto:elangton@dallasnews.com)