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Continuing what he began

Dallas: Scholarship in student's memory helps others reach college

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To Woodrow Wilson High School senior Lizeth Olvera, the \$5,000 she received last week to attend college is more than a scholarship.

In a sense, it's a gift from a friend.

Gustavo Ipiña was killed in a road-rage shooting in August 2004, just weeks before starting his senior year at Woodrow. He planned to be the first in his family to attend college and wanted to be an architect.

Lizeth, the second-youngest of seven siblings, is poised to be the first in her family to graduate from high school and attend college. And she'll do it in Gustavo's name.

"I'm so excited about it," she said. "It's extra special because he was my friend."

The Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship was founded last year by Taly Haffar, the Dallas County prosecutor who handled the case against Gustavo's killer. Recipients must be English-as-a-second-language students who exhibit traits ascribed to Gustavo: spirit, joy and a strong work ethic.

Teacher Marjorie Shaw called Gustavo "the kind of kid you hoped your [own] child would hang out with."

The first scholarship recipient, Cesar Ortiz, also was a friend of Gustavo. He is finishing his first year at Cedar Valley College, where he plays on the soccer team.

When Lizeth moved to Dallas from Mexico 4 1/2 years ago, she spoke no English. She excelled in the ESL program and quickly moved into mainstream classes, Mr. Haffar said.

Lizeth is a member of the National Honor Society, yearbook staff and ROTC. She danced with the ballet folklorico group, managed the boys soccer team and performed community service. She also works 30 hours a week at a grocery store.

"I am incredibly impressed by Lizeth's work ethic and determination to be a positive influence in the community," Mr. Haffar said. "Young individuals like Lizeth are inspirational. She came to the United States and quickly learned to speak fluent English, excelled in her school work and became an active volunteer at several charities."

Mr. Haffar's inspiration for the scholarship came from two sources. The first was the stories of Gustavo's family and friends.

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

The second influence was Mr. Haffar's own family. He and his sister, who is a doctor at UT Southwestern Medical Center, are first-generation Americans.

"My parents sacrificed a lot to give us the best life they could," he said. "We were fortunate to have a chance at the American dream. I am more than happy to help these students achieve similar success."

Lizeth plans to attend Richland College and in two years enroll at the University of Texas at Dallas. She wants to study nursing or photography.

Fellow prosecutor Erin Hendricks and Woodrow officials helped establish the scholarship fund, which has raised \$22,000. Mr. Haffar hopes to eventually increase the award so it pays for four years of college.

Annual fundraising events include an August art show and a December wine-tasting and silent auction. Send donations to GIMS, 3501 Bryan St. No. 3501, Dallas, 75204.