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Photo by Luke Chesmore

(l to r) Woodrow Principal Ruth Vail, teacher Marjorie Shaw, Taly Haffar, Erin Hendricks, and scholarship winner Lizeth Olvera.

## A Life's Legacy in a Scholarship

Posted June 25, 2007, 3:00 a.m. by Liz Mackinnon

Three years ago, Dallas County prosecutor Taly Haffar established the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship at Woodrow Wilson High School after a case he will never forget - in memory of a teenager he never knew. Today, Haffar spends most of his spare time maintaining the scholarship.

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In a recent interview with Lakewood-Now, Haffar talked about the case, the teenage victim, and why he remains so devoted to the legacy of the young man who just wanted to go to college.

### The tragic beginning

August 9, 2004. Gustavo Ipiña was heading home from work when the vehicle he was riding in almost hit a van. In an incident later described as road rage, the driver of the van pulled out a gun and fired one shot, killing Ipiña.

From the very beginning, "something stood out about this case," Haffar said. "From the minute it was indicted I received phone calls from his (Ipiña's) teachers at Woodrow, friends and family members. Before I even received a copy of the case I knew that many people cared about him."



Gustavo Ipiña was a friend to all.

"His mom and teachers described him as a person who brought happiness to everyone by just walking into a room. He would find the person in the room who was upset or sad and make them smile," Haffar said. "He got good grades, was inducted into the National Honor Society and he worked outside of school and bought his own car—he was just a very industrious young man." The phone calls afforded the young attorney a rare glimpse into the life of a crime victim—suddenly a name on a case file became a person.

"It was just a very moving situation, because you had a seventeen-year-old, a week away from his senior year in high school with all these dreams and aspirations—and to see them go unfulfilled just affected me."

## An immigrant connection

Ipiña's ultimate goal was to become an architect and build a house for his mother. The more Haffar learned about Ipiña and his family, the more compelled he felt to do something. Ipiña came from "a family of immigrants who, had basically focused all their efforts on him getting into college," he said. Haffar, the son of Turkish and Syrian parents, knows first hand about the struggles of immigrant families. "My sister and I are first generation Americans...my family sacrificed a lot, much like his family," for the sake of the kids, he said.

Today "my sister is a doctor and I'm a lawyer. Our parents struggled early on—so achieving that goal is like living the American dream." Haffar says that he, like Ipiña, was grateful for the sacrifices his parents made for him - the scholarship is his way of giving back. "I'm not doing it for myself, it's just something that I think needs to be done and if I can help someone else out then I feel better," Haffar said.

## Like having another job

The first fundraiser was a wine tasting and silent auction held in December 2005. "We had a tremendous turn-out, about two hundred people showed up which is a lot more than I expected," he said. "We raised about twelve to thirteen hundred in the first fundraiser." Over the years, Haffar has discovered that maintaining the scholarship is like having a part-time job. "I don't know if I realized how time consuming it would be," he said. Fellow prosecutor Erin Hendricks helps Haffar with the scholarship program, along with Woodrow ESL (English Second Language) instructor Marjorie Shaw, who was one of Ipiña's teachers.

"Fortunately, I have had a lot of help, not just from Erin and Marjorie, but lots of other DA's around here have offered their help anytime something comes up."

Three nights a week, Haffar is either securing donations for the auction, checking on the progress of last year's, scholarship recipient or reviewing current applications for the award. The scholarship is based on keeping Ipiña's legacy alive says Haffar. "We want to know that someone has the potential to succeed, to work hard," he said. "The other thing we look for is someone who can match Gustavo's personality, to a degree—a person that wants to succeed not just for themselves but for their families and for their community."

## Lizeth Olvera receives this year's award

This May, Taly Haffar and Erin Hendricks awarded the second annual GIMS, worth \$5000, to Woodrow senior, Lizeth Olvera. "Throughout high school she has been working thirty hours a week, which is incredibly impressive, that she can maintain a high grade point average, do a lot of extra curricular activities, volunteer and on top of that go to work."



Photo by Luke Chesmore  
Prosecutor Taly Haffar started and continues to administer the scholarship.

Haffar recalls the Tuesday night he called Olvera to tell her that she had a work and did not call him back until 11:30 pm. "She had a chance to work overtime at the grocery store and she jumped at the chance." "That's what she did," Haffar said. "That she was just so willing to sacrifice sleep to help her family."

## Following up

The first GIMS recipient was Woodrow graduate Cesar Ortiz in May 2006. To maintain a 3.0 average to keep the award, says Haffar. Scholarship recipients must maintain a 3.0 average each semester. "The student understands that if they slip below that 3.0 average, they are pulled and put back into the pool for the other scholarship recipient." "I'm motivated to get good grades, he says.

"Erin and I are taking Lizeth and Cesar to dinner tomorrow night to celebrate their first year with a 3.5 and also talk to Lizeth about her plans for college." "I'm working in the medical profession one day.

For now, Taly Haffar will keep working overtime on the scholarship to pay for donations. He will continue because it is the right thing to do and to honor a teenager who inspired him.

Contributions to the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship are accepted at any time, by contacting [Taly Haffar by email](#). Each year ESL teachers at Woodrow encourage their students to apply for the GIMS. Haffar and Hendricks choose a winner based on individual interviews with and recommendations from their teachers. ■

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Lizeth Olvera is the recipient of the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship for 2008.