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Photo by Liz Mackinnon

Cesar Ortiz, first recipient of the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship, stands in front of Woodrow Wilson High School.

Ipiña Scholarship Winner Reflects on College, Future

Posted August 16, 2007, 15:00 p.m. by Liz Mackinnon

As a child growing up in Mexico, Cesar Ortiz heard stories about life in the land of opportunity, but he never imagined that one day he would tell his own story.

Ortiz — a soft-spoken young man with a passion for soccer, a dry sense of humor, and a sincere example of modesty — became the first recipient of the Gustavo Ipiña Memorial Scholarship at Woodrow Wilson High School in 2006. One year later, he talked about completing his first year of college with a 3.5 grade point average, and how he almost missed the deadline for the scholarship that helped him get there.

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Photo by Liz Mackinnon

"I wasn't trying to get the scholarship; I did it at the last minute. I filled out the papers because one of the teachers was putting the pressure on me to," Ortiz said.

Ortiz wanted the scholarship but thought he had little to no chance of winning.

"I read my classmates' essays, and they were better than mine, so I said to them, 'OK, you won.' "

Despite his words, though, Ortiz persevered. In fact he made a deal with himself regarding the scholarship.

Cesar Ortiz harbors a passion for soccer.

here and go to college," Ortiz said.

"I said that if I didn't get the scholarship I would go back to Mexico and do what I could do there, but if I won, I would stay

A winning personality

The next step in the competition was an interview with the man who established the fund — Taly Haffar, a Dallas County assistant district attorney who prosecuted the road-rage murder of the scholarship's namesake three years ago. Ortiz worried about the impression he might make on Haffar.

"I was absent when my teacher told us the date of the interviews, so my classmates were all dressed up that day, and I was not," he said. "But, I tried my best in the interview."

His best earned him the \$5,000 scholarship and won him a new friend.

"Taly is a good person," he said. "He is very serious, but also he seems like a teenager. I can talk to him like he is a real good friend," Ortiz said.

A friend who understands being an immigrant.

"One time, I went to school with him to buy books, and he told me the story of his parents coming here from Turkey, I think, and starting a business," Ortiz said. "We've been through the same things."



Photo by Liz Mackinnon

Taly Haffar, an assistant district attorney, established the scholarship won by Cesar Ortiz.

The legacy

Haffar established the G.I.M.S. in 2005 to honor the life of Gustavo Ipiña, a Woodrow student who was killed in a road-rage incident just one week before his senior year. Ortiz said winning the scholarship was important to him, not only as a means of paying for college but as a way to honor a friend.



Courtesy Photo

Gustavo Ipiña reached out to help others.

"[Ipiña] was in my ESL (English as a second language) classes," Ortiz said. "He was a good friend, but I wasn't trying to use the image of him to be where I am now. I wanted to win it for him, but I also wanted to do it for me. I tried to think about the things he would do in his life and do them in my life."

Ortiz also adopted Ipiña's dedication to family.

"He had a lot of dreams — to be an architect some day and give his mom a house," Ortiz said. "So, probably, if I could do it some day, I could help her, too."

What might have been, what could be

In many ways, winning the scholarship was like starting over again, he said.

"Sometimes I start thinking what would have happened if I had gone down there [to Mexico]," he said. "I would start working and probably never go to school, so I think it's going to be better here, studying, having a career. I can do better things."

Ortiz wants to be a psychologist some day and help children in his East Dallas neighborhood.

"I want to work with kids because they are the ones that can change," he said.

To donate to the G.I.M.S., contact [Taly Haffar](#) or mail a contribution to:
G.I.M.S.
3501 Bryan St., No. 3501
Dallas 75204

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Photo by Liz Mackinnon

Taly Haffar reconnects with 2007 scholarship recipient Lizeth Olvera, center, and Marya Falcon at last night's fundraiser for the Gustavo Ipiñera Memorial Scholarship.



Photo by Liz Mackinnon

Woodrow class of '76 alumni and staunch Wildcat backer Kyle Rains with Taly Haffar



Photo by Liz Mackinnon

Marjorie Shaw, who was one of IpiÅ±a's teachers at Woodrow

2 responses to this article

probably me said at 17:20 p.m. on August 16, 2007, 17:20 p.m.

Liz's articles are always so up close and personal that I always end up feeling I know the person she interviewed. She has a way of getting into that person to get the whole story. I always enjoy her writing.

mf.tx said at 19:16 p.m. on August 20, 2007, 19:16 p.m.

I'm pleased to see that Lakewood-Now and the writer (Ms Mackinnon) have continued to follow this story. It is wonderful to have good news, especially since this one began with a senseless tragedy. Thank you. I look forward to future stories on this and other human interest stories with "meat" from Ms Mackinnon.

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