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Scholarship Honors Exemplary ESL Students



Reporting
Brooke Richie

DALLAS (CBS 11 News) — It has been nearly four years since 17-year-old Gustavo Ipina was killed in a road rage incident.

But his memory lives on thanks to a scholarship started by the prosecutor who tried the case.

"Everybody would describe her as lighting up a room when she walked in, just like Gustavo used to," former Dallas County Prosecutor Taly Haffar said about Elsa Olvera. The Wilson High School senior plans to become a bilingual teacher after she graduates from Eastfield College in Mesquite.

Haffar called her Sunday to tell her she was one of the recipients of the Gustavo Ipina Memorial Scholarship.

"I was excited about it, because I didn't expect to win it," said Olvera. She and her family moved to Dallas from Mexico four years ago. At the time, she spoke only basic English.

Yichuan Lu will attend the University of Texas at Dallas to study engineering.

"He has maintained a high academic performance since he got here three years ago, much like Gustavo, as well as sharing a love for his family," Haffar said.

Lu's family moved to Texas from China. He, too, barely spoke English when he arrived. Today, he has graduated from Woodrow Wilson's ESL classes to its Advanced Placement classes. He, too, is a recipient of the Gustavo Ipina Memorial Scholarship.

"It will save a lot of money for my parents, my family," said Lu.

Both students are charged with fulfilling not only their own dreams, but those of Ipina as well. The fellow Woodrow Wilson student was shot and killed in a road rage incident in 2004. He was weeks away from beginning his senior year and was to become the first person in his family to attend college. It was a case Haffar, now with the U.S. Attorney's Office, will never forget.

"Every time I revisit it, it pulls at my heartstrings," he said. "It's unfortunate that such a tragedy had to occur, but at least something good is coming of it."

That's why he and fellow prosecutor Erin Hendricks established the scholarship fund. The \$5,000 grant goes toward college expenses, including tuition, books and housing. Every year, it goes to a current or former Woodrow Wilson ESL student. But this is the first year it has gone to two students.

"We just couldn't decide between the two of them," Haffar says. "Both of them are exemplary students and have a lot of the characteristics that Gustavo Ipina had."

"It does help a lot," said Lu. "It's like one step closer to the American Dream."

"I know I have this opportunity, and I won't let it go," said Olvera. "We're having the opportunity with this scholarship to do what we want to do, the opportunity he didn't have."

To contribute to the Gustavo Ipina Memorial Scholarship, send donations to:
GIMS
3501 Bryan St., No. 3501

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