

Five Santa Clara County students awarded REACH scholarships

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SAN JOSE (May 13, 2004) – Five Santa Clara County high school seniors were awarded REACH Youth Scholarships at a breakfast today, which honored a record 47 local students who have overcome adversity to excel in both academics and athletics.

NFL Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott and San Jose Earthquakes midfielder Richard Mulrooney, program co-chairs, gave out \$9,000 in scholarship awards on behalf of presenting sponsor Bridge Bank with support from Hewlett-Packard Co., Southwest Airlines and the San Jose Marriott, host of the breakfast. REACH is an acronym for Recognizing Excellence, Adversity, Courage and Hard work, in its ninth year as a program of the San Jose Sports Authority.

"The Sports Authority's most visible role in our community is bringing premier sports events to San Jose, but nothing we do is more rewarding than increasing the amateur sports opportunities for our youth," said Dean Munro, executive director of the San Jose Sports Authority. "We are proud to honor all 47 nominees for this year's REACH Youth Scholarships. They represent 20 high schools, and each is a young person who has overcome tremendous obstacles in his or her personal life through participation in school athletics."

Teachers, counselors and coaches from each high school in Santa Clara County were asked to nominate students who they felt matched the scholarship criteria. Students submitted an essay detailing how he or she was able to overcome adversity and the role that sports played in helping them do so. A panel of local community leaders reviewed the essays and selected the six scholarship recipients, who received scholarships ranging from \$1,250 to \$2,500 (list of recipients follows).

For event photographs and further information, please call Talya Rogers at the San Jose Sports Authority.

Scholarship Award Winners (award citations by Master of Ceremonies Robert Braunstein):

Jaime Uriarte – San Jose Academy (\$2,500)

After being evicted from his home, Jaime, along with his mother and sister, found himself suddenly homeless. Day-to-day living meant moving their belongings from hotel to hotel. Sleeping in a hotel meant heat and water, but there were times when they had to sleep in their car. To him, the hardest part of being homeless was not knowing where home would be each day after football and track practice. He found his escape in his schoolwork and athletics. He was enrolled in International Baccalaureate, or I.B., courses, but did not have resources such as a computer or even a dictionary. Through the assistance of public resources, AVID and supportive teachers, he was able to excel in his I.B. classes, and put himself on the road to college and reaching his lifelong goal of becoming an FBI agent. On the football field, he was able to forget about being homeless and channel all his energies into the game. Eventually, his family qualified for a low income housing program called Housing Authority, and as a result, is no longer homeless. In addition, his dedication on the football field resulted in his selection to play in the Charlie Wedemeyer Silicon Valley Youth Classic All-Star football game.

Giulietta Pezzaniti – Willow Glen High School (\$2,000)

Giulietta was born with an abnormal nerve in her heart and diagnosed with the rarest type of SVT, supra ventricular tachycardia. When her heart races out of control, she is rushed to the emergency room where she is injected with medicine that travels painfully throughout her body. During the fall and winter of 2002, she was at the hospital every two weeks meeting with new cardiologists and SVT specialists. The burden of her illness along with her advanced schoolwork and sports, weighed heavily on her both mentally and physically. But her desire to lead a normal life helped her to stay focused, and motivated her to remain active in school clubs and community activities. In the winter of 2002, she found out she had to have surgery and was forced to give up playing basketball. Her sadness over giving up a sport she loved was eased by the start of badminton season. She drew strength and inspiration from her coach and teammates and even made it to the league finals. Being active in various activities and sports allowed her to feel like everyone else and her illness motivated her to try harder and excel in the sports she played. Sports also allowed her to escape, have fun, and experience life.

Megan Smith – Gunderson High School (\$1,750)

Growing up, for Megan, meant dealing with her sister's Hodgkin's disease. When her junior year approached, she was playing basketball and volleyball, involved in numerous school activities, and best of all, her sister's cancer was in remission. Then, she found out that her mother was diagnosed with cancer – Hodgkin's disease – just like her sister. Doctors told her family that this type of cancer usually skips a generation, but there is a one-in-one-thousand chance of that not happening. Following her volleyball coach's valuable advice, she kept herself busy by focusing on the goals she had set for herself prior to starting junior year. As a result, she ran for and was elected Junior Class Secretary and joined numerous other school clubs. Near the end of volleyball season, and embarrassed about losing her hair, her mother stopped going to the games. By the time basketball season came, she was so concerned about her mom, it was a struggle to concentrate on the court. Looking back on her senior year, she is proud of her accomplishments, which include: second team all-league in volleyball, CCS playoffs in basketball, and ASB Secretary of her high school.

Kacie Taranto – Presentation High School (\$1,500)

Kacie's world was turned upside down by her father's death from a sudden heart attack almost three years ago. Not only was her father's untimely death an emotional challenge, but it also turned out to be a financial one. Her father was the family's sole wage earner and was unable to obtain life insurance. To make matters worse, her mother turned to alcohol to escape the pain of her husband's death. With her brother away at college, she found herself virtually living on her own. Determined to live a normal life, she continued to stay focused on her studies, school activities, and sports. The two sports she has been involved in throughout her high school years are water polo and swimming. The fact that she shared a love of these sports with her father made competing all the more meaningful. She joined the Santa Clara International Swim Team and made it to CCS, competing in both the 500 and 50 free, in her sophomore and junior year. Today, she realizes that swimming and water polo helped her stay healthy both mentally and physically. The success she found in sports also showed her what she can accomplish when she puts her heart and mind into something.

Ernesto Ancona – Fremont High School (\$1,250)

Athletics saved Ernesto from going down the wrong path. Heading into high school, he was, in his own words, "a rebellious and uncontrollable pre-teen, constantly getting into trouble." His sister thought sports would be a positive influence in his life and suggested that he try out for the wrestling team. For the first time in his life, he learned that the true meaning of tough did not have anything to do with causing trouble or violence. His coach actively encouraged Ernesto to change his lifestyle and even volunteered to appear in court on his behalf. Thanks in large part to his coach, he was placed in a program called E.M.P. instead of a juvenile delinquent center. The program required him to inform an E.M.P. officer before leaving his house and to wrestle with a pager attached to his ankles. Today, he has been a member of his high school wrestling team for the past four years. During his junior year, he placed second in the Santa Clara Valley League

and sixth in CCS despite wrestling with a fractured foot. And, in his senior year, he took first place in the Santa Clara Valley League, third in CCS, and placed in the top 12 in the state of California.

2004 REACH Youth Scholarship nominees:

Jose Albarran – *Gilroy High School*
Veronica M. Alcantar – *W.C. Overfelt High School*
Ernesto Ancona – *Fremont High School*
Michael Barahona – *Los Altos High School*
Allison Best – *Mountain View High School*
Juana Calderon – *W.C. Overfelt High School*
Emily Ching-Che Chan – *Lynbrook High School*
Liezl Dacuycuy – *Andrew Hill High School*
Brad Fischer – *Santa Teresa High School*
Jessica Guinn – *Palo Alto High School*
Juan Gutierrez – *Downtown College Preparatory*
Omar Gutierrez – *Willow Glen High School*
Sarah-Marie Hoeft – *Gilroy High School*
Catherine Kung – *Homestead High School*
Nick Larice – *Live Oak High School*
Adrian Loera – *San Jose High Academy*
Kyle Loving – *Gilroy High School*
Salvador Madrigal – *Lincoln High School*
Alexander Martinez - *Santa Teresa High School*
Mindy Marquez – *Gilroy High School*
Amelia Mendez – *Silver Creek High School*
Hugo Meza – *San Jose High Academy*
Jerrell Morales – *Gilroy High School*
Huy Nguyen – *Andrew Hill High School*
Chris Olague – *W.C. Overfelt High School*
Avinash Oza – *Palo Alto High School*
Allan Park – *Fremont High School*
Veronica Lugo Perez – *Downtown College Preparatory*
Giulietta Pezzaniti – *Willow Glen High School*
Ngoan Phan – *Willow Glen High School*
Preeti Elizabeth Piplani – *Los Altos High School*
Erika Rico – *Downtown College Preparatory*
Danielle Riviere – *Presentation High School*
Kiira Rodriguez – *San Jose High Academy*
Kristi Roybal – *Saint Francis High School*
Ricardo Salas – *Downtown College Preparatory*
Sara Schulte – *Palo Alto High School*
Kelsey Severns – *Fremont High School*
Megan Smith – *Gunderson High School*
Katherine Stolpa – *Palo Alto High School*
Melody Su – *Fremont High School*
Kacie Taranto– *Presentation High School*
Jaime Uriarte – *San Jose High Academy*
Patrick Vane – *Archbishop Mitty High School*
Scott Wells – *Palo Alto High School*
Angela Williams – *Lincoln High School*
Mark Zabala – *Gilroy High School*