

Six Santa Clara County students awarded REACH Scholarships

For Immediate Release

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SAN JOSE (May 12, 2004) – Six Santa Clara County high school seniors were awarded REACH Youth Scholarships at a breakfast today, which honored a 31 local students who have overcome adversity to excel in both academics and athletics.

NFL Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott, honorary chair, and San Jose State basketball player Lamisha Augustine gave out \$10,000 in scholarship awards on behalf of presenting sponsor Bridge Bank, with support from Hewlett-Packard, Cal-Hi Sports Bay Area, 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 10th year as a program of the San Jose Sports Authority.

"We are proud to honor all 31 nominees for this year's REACH Youth Scholarships," said Dean Munro, executive director of the San Jose Sports Authority. "Each is a young person who has overcome tremendous obstacles in his or her personal life through participation in school athletics, and as a supporter of youth sports in our community, the Sports Authority is proud to spotlight their achievements."

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 essays detailing how they were 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 \$1,000 to \$2,500 (list of recipients follows).

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

Scholarship Award Winners

(award citations by Master of Ceremonies Robert Braunstein):

Jackie Cimino – Presentation High School (\$2,500)

Cimino loved horses. Really loved them. At 13 she convinced her parents to give her horseback riding lessons and promised to work to pay for them. She volunteered at the stables mucking stalls, cleaning hooves, saddling and caring for 40 horses. For every four hours she worked, she received half an hour of free riding time. Because of her love for horses, she was offered a free rodeo horse named Baxter. Seven months later, she and Baxter competed in their first rodeo competition and later joined the National High School Rodeo Association. They were ready for serious competitions by her sophomore year. The rodeo they entered the day before her 16th birthday was tragic. She was injured in the goat-tying competition and airlifted to Stanford Hospital, where she lay unconscious for three weeks. When she awoke, she learned that her spinal cord had been damaged and she was paralyzed from the chest down. Although she deeply missed rodeo, she said she "did not have time to be negative." After intense rehabilitation at Valley Medical Center, she was introduced to wheelchair tennis. Just seven months after the accident, she played in her first tournament. Today, only two years after her accident, she has traveled across the country to compete in tennis, played on her high school varsity tennis team, and even played doubles with able-bodied players. She is 10th in the nation in the junior wheelchair open division, No. 4 in the women's A's division and has been awarded the tennis chair from the SCORE Foundation. In her spare time, she visits Valley Medical Center to talk to newly injured adolescents. This fall she will enter the University of Arizona where she will participate in collegiate wheelchair tennis.

Brad Kompelien – Willow Glen High School (\$2,000)

Kompelien dreamed of being a major league baseball player all his life. But when he was diagnosed with osteo sarcoma – bone cancer – and had to have the lower half of his leg amputated in the sixth grade, he wasn't sure if he would ever be able to play sports again. Twenty-two rounds of chemotherapy took a further toll. Doctors said it was likely he would have learning disabilities. Learning how to walk again and working

his way out of a limp was the most difficult task of his life. He entered high school determined to find a sport he could play, which didn't require running. A friend suggested golf, which he had never played, but he tried out anyway and made the team. But being on the team wasn't enough. Kompelien worked hard and by his junior year had climbed to No.2 on his team, helping it win the Blossom Valley Athletic League Championship. His battle with cancer opened his eyes to a seeing life in a new light. He has found peace throughout his day and no longer worries about what happens around him because of his faith in God. He once viewed cancer as a burden, but now realizes that it has shaped the foundation of his life and personality. Today, he is a student leader in his church youth group and a member of his school's yearbook committee. He also spends time helping others by making meals at a homeless shelter and tutoring elementary school children. He has beaten the odds against both cancer and participating in sports. His doctors will be happy to hear that not only does he have a 3.7 grade-point-average, but he is also a member of the National Honor Roll. Although he has already had to endure tremendous challenges, they have prepared him for overcoming those that lie ahead in life and on the golf course.

Mallory Stein – Willow Glen High School (\$1,750)

Until high school Stein had been suppressing terrible memories that stood between her and a full life. An essay for English class her junior year finally allowed her to write about the childhood abuse she had been hiding inside. Her courage allowed her to face down her demon in court, removing him from society and protecting others from his abuse. Coming out about her problems set her free, but at the same time brought forth other challenges. Revealing her secrets affected her confidence and concentration, making everyday tasks, school – even sleep – difficult. There were two positive forces in her world of uncertainty: her passion for field hockey and support from her mother. Field hockey allowed her to escape problems from the moment she stepped onto the field. Her drive to score goals displaced all her troubles. Once she stepped off the field and back into the world where her difficulties lay, her mom was always there to help.

But in January, her mom died unexpectedly. As Stein tries now to cope with her loss, field hockey continues to bring her joy. In addition to being the captain of the varsity field hockey team, this amazing young woman works about 20 hours a week, is president of both the Hilltop 4-H Club and the AGAPE Christian Club, and has won numerous awards. Despite what life has thrown her, she is able to look back and be proud of the free, strong young woman she has become.

Mikaela Gillette – Presentation High School (\$1,500)

Gillette first fell in love with softball after meeting Mike McCormick, a Cy Young award winner and former San Francisco Giant. From then on, she dreamed of becoming a pitcher and playing softball in college. She was well on her way, joining a competitive travel team at 11 years old and advancing to a 17-year-old team when she was only 14. But a serious injury during a Sunday morning game threw her dream into jeopardy. The bone deformation in her hip, coupled with the stress of softball, tore the labrum – cartilage that stabilizes the hip joint. The surgeries required to repair her hip were dangerous – they might get her back on the softball diamond, but they could also leave her paralyzed. Gillette made it back to the field. After months of physical therapy she was able to make it back onto her high school softball team. Despite the two-hour physical therapy sessions she attended three times each week, she had the highest academic grades she had ever made. She returned to the team her senior year and was named captain.

Today, she is a contender for starting positions at either second or third base, and she will be part of her team's success should it make the CCS Championships. When she's not on the field, she is the secretary for the Almaden Library & Community Center Advisory Board, a member of the Math Society and the California Scholarship Federation. She also received the 2003 Good Neighbor Award from Mayor Ron Gonzalez and is one of the Founding Members of the teen center "The Spot."

Katie Peek – Santa Clara High School (\$1,250)

Hearing loss, short term memory lapses, speech impediments, imbalance and poor motor skills were all problems Peek had to deal with growing up because of her brain stem and auditory processing disorders. Things we all take for granted, like walking and remembering the alphabet, were very difficult for her. While her brother and sister participated in activities like karate and gymnastics, she spent her time in speech therapy and occupational therapy learning to hold a pencil correctly. Her lack of balance often caused her to fall down and made her the object of other kids' laughter. Peek took her mother's advice: "Put one foot in front of the other or sit out and watch everyone else having fun" Mom told her. She did and turned her life around. She learned to play the flute. She made it within one level of a black belt in karate. She swam with the Santa Clara Aquamaids. Most important, she learned to laugh with the other kids. The first time she beat her brother at basketball she fell in love with that sport. She was determined to defy the odds and play high

school basketball, and by her sophomore year, she had become a starter. She now plays tennis and badminton for her school and is involved in her church youth group. She's also been on the honor roll for four years and is on the Who's Who List for high school students. She plans on going back for her black belt some day, but for now, driving is her next challenge.

Katie Dee – Santa Teresa High School (\$1,000)

Dee first learned to overcome obstacles her freshman year at when her aunt – who had been her hero and rock – lost a 10-year battle with cancer. Watching her aunt during the last three months of her life and dealing with her loss was extremely difficult, but she was able to find a distraction in softball. For the two hours she was on the field, all her troubles disappeared. Last year, Dee was faced with another life-altering challenge. Her abdomen had grown abnormally large. Doctors diagnosed ovarian cancer and rushed her to surgery. They removed a 15-pound tumor the size of a basketball along with her ovary. The severity of the surgery forced her to sit out of school and sports for six weeks. But although her rehabilitation limited her to just 10 minutes a day on a stationary bike, her determination to get back onto the field motivated her to step up to the challenge. Last November she turned to softball once again for escape when her grandfather suffered a stroke, which left him paralyzed from the waist down. Today, Dee is a member of the National Honor Society, GATE and is on the principal's, presidential and superintendent's lists. She coaches a youth soccer team, tutors and participates in Relay For Life. She won her softball team's Best Offense award and plans on attending the University of California, San Diego. Throughout all of life's obstacles, softball has helped through the hard times and kept her focused, driven and determined.

2004 REACH Youth Scholarship nominees:

Hassan Abdullahi, *Live Oak High School*

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Jackie Cimino, *Presentation High School*

Brijitti Crum, *Eastside College Prep*

Robert Deauville, *Branham High School*

Katie Dee, *Santa Teresa High School*

Michelle Di Fiore, *Gilroy High School*

Desalegn Ejigu, *Santa Clara High School*

Mikaela Gillette, *Presentation High School*

Nancy Gonzalez, *William C. Overfelt High School*

Noelle Guiriba, *Independence High School*

Ally Ha, *Andrew P. Hill High School*

Bradley Kompelien, *Willow Glen High School*

Jenessa Lee Locklin, *Santa Clara High High School*

Jeffrey Lyu, *Saratoga High School*

Bryan Mai, *Gunderson High School*

Jose Martinez, *Eastside College Prep*

Jennifer Navala, *Santa Teresa High School*

Julie Nguyen, *Andrew P. Hill High School*

Candace Nisby, *Santa Clara High School*

Melissa Norman, *Santa Teresa High School*

Katie Peek, *Santa Clara High School*

Esmeralda Rangel, *William C. Overfelt High School*

Edson Sanchez, *San Jose High Academy*

Monica Sandoval, *William C. Overfelt High School*

Kristen Scheff, *Westmont High School*

Haruki Shimoda, *Fremont High School*

Ashley Spelman, *Fremont High School*

Mallory Stein, *Willow Glen High School*

Cesar Misael Tirado, *Eastside College Prep*

Jennifer Tran, *Palo Alto High School*