

Three Denton High students named to list of 1,000 national Gates Millennium Scholars

Seniors win scholarships out of applicant pool exceeding 57,000



Denton High School's 2015 Gates Millennium Scholars (from left) Amira Spikes, Flor De La Garza and Maribel Barrera, who could each receive up to 10 years of post-secondary education fully paid for.

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Each year, more than 50,000 students from across the U.S. submit applications to the Gates Millennium Scholars Program in hopes of winning one of just 1,000 scholarships. This year, three of those 1,000 recipients attend Denton High School.

Denton seniors Maribel Barrera, Flor De La Garza and Amira Spikes received letters on Monday, April 20, confirming their selection as 2015 Gates Millennium Scholars. This year, more than 57,000 students applied for the prestigious scholarship, which the program called “one of the most competitive candidate groups” in its history.

As a result of the honor, the Denton students can have up to 10 years of post-secondary education partially or fully paid for.

Maribel, who will attend the University of North Texas and plans study chemistry and pharmacology, noted that the scholarship’s potential duration can help her achieve a family first.

“This scholarship is my pathway to success, and it makes me much more motivated to continue what I’m doing, because hard work really does pay off,” she said. “Not only am I graduating high school, but I have the chance to become the first member of my family with a Ph. D.”

The Gates Millennium Scholars Program, funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is open to minority high school candidates who are legal U.S. residents with GPAs of 3.3 or better and qualify for the federal Pell Grant. Scholars are selected based on their academic abilities, community service and leadership. Applicants must also show a financial need for the esteemed award.

In addition to the student requirements, an educator must first nominate a student applicant for consideration by the program. Furthermore, each student candidate must receive a recommendation from an adult familiar with his or her community service and leadership activities.

Amira, who plans to attend the University of Houston and study petroleum engineering, called her recognition an unbelievable honor and showed gratitude to those who helped her receive a nomination and recommendation for the scholarship.

“As a first-generation college student, I am extremely blessed with this life-changing scholarship,” she said. “All I can say is that my faith and hard work paid off. I want to thank everyone who has helped me in this process.”

As with all three Denton winners, Amira is heavily involved in extracurricular activities, one of the major considerations for the scholarship. All three are members of the school Student Council, for instance, and each participates in at least five extracurricular activities at the school or in the community.

Flor, who plans to study health promotions at the University of Texas, echoed her fellow recipients’ feelings on the scholarship, calling it a “validation of every effort, blessing and struggle I have endured.”

“Even though my mother is a single mom, all of the work she has put in every single day is the driving force behind my inspiration and dedication to be the first in my family to go to college and pursue a Ph. D,” she said. “It has been a nonstop journey of classes to better myself, and the GMS is just proof that it is possible for a female minority student to get an opportunity for success.”