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Vicente Perez
 photo by Nick Young



Surmounting Walls with Educational Footholds

By Heather Darrow

A 15-FT WALL separates Vicente Perez and his grandmother from the expensive homes in Frisco. Fully sated after enjoying one of his grandmother's exceptional meals, he emerges from the entrance of their trailer and tries to imagine what life is like on the other side of that wall and why the wall exists in the first place. While the answers to his musings are

not forthcoming, that wall looks a little less imposing each day. Vicente will soon be the first in his family to earn a college degree. He is one of the lucky few who received scholarships to attend Collin College.

"The million dollar homes are the size of eight of our houses and it gets a lot of people down and they get stuck in a rut.

I know that I am paving a path by getting a degree. If we can make that path wider it will bring the standard of living up for so many. If you took people to my neighborhood they would understand that scholarships are needed today," Vicente said.

After high school, he served in the Navy for four years. Though he has never owned a new car, he has traveled the world.

Vicente is pursuing a degree in emergency administration and program planning. He works part-time as a recreation aid at the Senior Center at Frisco Square, attends school full time and serves in the Reserves. As a high school student, he worked full time at Wal-Mart to earn money. After graduating from high school, he served in the Navy for four years. Though he has never owned a new car, he has traveled the world. While he was on the maiden voyage of the USS Ronald Reagan in the Persian Gulf, his grandfather became ill and passed away.

"The last time I saw him he wasn't sick," Vicente said. "While I was gone, he had his leg amputated. By the time I was back, he was gone. I decided not to reenlist and live with my grandma. It helps her and it helps me. We are sharing the bills."

Vicente is proud to be earning a degree. His grandmother stopped her education in the second or third grade because her mother died and she had to cook for her 10 siblings and her father. She is still working today as a door

greeter at Wal-Mart.

"We couldn't use as much water or electricity without this scholarship. It's hard to pay for just living and then with school on top of that. My grandmother is very supportive. She wants me to make a better future," Vicente said. "When I told her that one of my books cost \$117 she said, 'Do you know how much food you could buy with that?' I told her that it would pay off in the long run."

Collin College President Cary A. Israel says every year the number of students who apply for financial aid and scholarships continues to rise.

"In 2000 the college awarded \$2.4 million in financial aid and scholarships; in 2007 that number topped \$16.5million. That kind of astronomical increase in just a few short years demonstrates the incredible need that must be met. When corporations and private citizens support Collin College, they are investing in students who will transfer to universities and earn undergraduate degrees or who will enter the workforce immediately to serve as nurses, firefighters and emergency medical professionals. In both cases, donors are investing in this community's future vitality through gifts of higher education," Dr. Israel said.

For Vicente, Collin College is more than just a school. It is a community of individuals who are supporting him on his journey to earn a degree.

"Collin College holds education at a high level. I have a friend who attends a university and he says at Collin College they expect more of you. I like that. I know I am getting a good education here. The teachers know if you attend class; they know you are missing. The professors I have here are passionate about what they do," Vicente said.

This year the Collin College Foundation is offering Collin Cabaret: An Evening of Entertainment for Education. The black tie event will be held at 6:30 p.m., on Saturday, February 16th in the Frisco Conference Center in the Embassy Suites Hotel. The 2008 Collin Cabaret event is an interactive evening of entertainment featuring professional musicians and familiar Broadway show tunes, jazz and instrumental music. Funds raised from the event benefit student scholarships and academic excellence.

"Increasing college costs make it

difficult for many, including middle-income families, to send their children to college. But students who want to transfer to a university can start at Collin College, making a college education affordable. The college is a true asset to this community, and I'd like to thank the donors for their generosity and commitment to education. Your actions today will impact lives forever," said Ron Johnson, Collin College Foundation board chair.

There is a real need for scholarships. Look at my path from homeless and battered to All-American academic scholar and manager in corporate America.

Frisco resident Steve Maus has proof that Mr. Johnson's words are true. He serves on the Collin College Foundation board and his family has been donating scholarships to the college since 2000. He has watched higher education transform people's lives.

The Maus family receives cards and letters from his scholarship recipients who graduated from Collin College and universities and are now gainfully employed; students like Yeimi Ponce who was working a dead-end job after graduating from high school and is now employed as a CPA in an accounting firm. Single mother Adele Bailey received two of the family's scholarships and attained success long before she graduated from Collin College with a 4.0 grade point average. A member of the college's Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) honor society, Adele began volunteering in the community while attending school. In 2005 PTK, the American Association of Community Colleges and USA Today named her to the All-USA Academic Team.

At Southern Methodist University, Adele was awarded the Meadows Undergraduate Student Research and Activities Fund twice and graduated

magna cum laude with a BFA in 2007. Now a Hewlett Packard Remote Deployment Manager, Adele says without the Collin scholarships her economic standing would have remained through the next generation of her family.

"When making my decision about where to attend college, I looked for the best. Quite simply, in my opinion, Collin College is the best and it will continue to attract and produce the best students. With the infrastructure and resources the college provided, I was empowered to grow into a scholar, leader and servant in school, my community and nation. Not only did the funding from scholarships enable me to complete my degree it also provided an imperative incentive that spurred me to greater excellence in all my endeavors. These awards prepared me to continue with distinction in a well rounded profession since my graduation," Adele said.

"There is a real need for scholarships. Look at my path from homeless and battered to All-American academic scholar and now manager in corporate America. Is it better to tend to me as a ward of the state or to enable me to become part of this viable and great society where I proudly contribute to better the lives of others who are following the same path?" asked Adele.

According to Mr. Maus, when he shares stories about students like Vicente and Adele, people are amazed.

"This is an investment that our family is making and it comes back to the community many times over. These students offer significant value to the community and they are the future philanthropists. Education is an investment in the future with a multiplier effect. You can educate a person who is making \$22,000 a year so that he can make \$66,000 a year, own his own business and employ other people. Just like bringing a baseball field to Frisco brought new hotels and restaurants that employ more people, investment in education has a profound social impact," Mr. Maus said.

Mr. Maus and his family moved to Frisco 22 years ago. He operates the Frisco-based Nautilus Group, New York Life firm that specializes in estate planning and business exit strategies and serves clients across the nation. He and



Working at the Senior Center

photo by Nick Young

his wife, Libby, are staunch supporters of education. Mrs. Maus served on the Frisco school board for 12 years and was named 2002 citizen of the year. While she fostered secondary education, Mr. Maus put his efforts into higher education.

You give money to the government or to projects meaningful to you...We think it is better to contribute to things that are meaningful to us, like the college.

"I can remember when Collin College was trying to decide where the next campus should be. I joined Sam Roach, Bob Warren and many others in lobbying for Frisco. Now, we have Preston Ridge

Campus. Several of my children's friends attended Collin College. After earning their degrees, they could have gone anywhere, but they decided to live in Frisco. Some are teachers and coaches in our Frisco schools," Mr. Maus said.

Mr. Maus also believes the scholarships served as a teaching tool for his children. Philanthropy was openly discussed in his family. His children, Cynthia and Richard, learned about thrift, savings and that a certain part of everyone's earnings is social capital.

"You either give money to the government or give it to projects that are meaningful to you. We think it is better to contribute to things that are meaningful, like the college. Many of the students have told us they want to set up their own scholarships and give back to the college when they are able. The students are the heroes," Mr. Maus said.

Vicente knows that he will continue to confront walls in his life, but he says he will do what he has to do to make it. He said, "My grandparents taught

me to be happy. I have a roof over my head, food and clothes. Sometimes my grandmother gets sad that she can't provide more for me, but I tell her that I am good. I have a chance because I have a scholarship and there are a lot of people in our neighborhood who don't have a chance."

Collin College Foundation has produced scholarship galas since 2001. The Monopoly event was held from 2001 to 2004. The Plain and Fancy Gala was the themed event for 2005 and 2006 and in 2007, Monopoly returned with a record \$205,000 raised at the event. Over the years, both attendance and contributions have continued to increase. With the need for college scholarships increasing annually, more students are able to benefit from the generosity of the Foundation's contributors. 2008 Collin Cabaret sponsor partnerships are still available.

Heather Darrow is a writer for Collin College.