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Keizer students turn grades, behavior around



KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley
McNary senior Maria Cervantes was awarded a \$65,380 per year scholarship to Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Cervantes follows Obama's footsteps

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

When applying for colleges to study political science, McNary senior Maria Cervantes went big.

And that decision is paying off. Cervantes had never heard of Occidental College, located in Los Angeles, before finding out one of her role models, former president Barack Obama, had gone there before transferring to Columbia.

"I wasn't going to get into an Ivy League but I wanted a good school so I figured if president Obama went, it probably is a good school for political science," Cervantes said.

Cervantes was leaning towards staying close to home and attending Reed College in Portland until she got her acceptance from Occidental and saw the amount of money they were offering. Cervantes is receiving a \$65,380 scholarship per year. Tuition at Occidental is \$67,800.

Cervantes isn't sure how she received so much scholarship money. The application was just like all the other colleges. For the essay, Cervantes wrote about her parents moving to America from Mexico when she was just a baby.

"I think that's (essay) what probably helped me," Cervantes said. "My grades are good and

all and I did decently on the SATs but I was really surprised when I got the scholarship information."

Cervantes' interest in politics began in middle school when she started paying more attention to the news. She was also influenced by her older brother who graduated from Willamette after McNary.

"I saw him going to debate tournaments and meeting the justices from the courts here in Oregon and talking about meeting the mayor," Cervantes said. "It sounded interesting and like something that I would want to do. I think working in the cabinet would be really cool someday."

Cervantes has spoken to Occidental administrators over the phone and reached out to current students through social media. She'll visit the campus for the first time this summer.

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Elsa Chavez-Chavez's face lit up as she talked about graduating from McNary High School in front of her parents, younger brother and sisters.

"Since I'm the oldest one, I wanted to be the first to graduate from high school and get a diploma so my parents could see me," Chavez-Chavez said. "I just wanted to prove everyone that doubted me that I wasn't going to graduate and I am now I'm so excited."

Chavez-Chavez, one of three Keizer students to receive a 2017 Turnaround Achievement Award, wasn't sure she would graduate on time a year ago.

"I was slacking and it was hard to concentrate and then all the family problems going on were super stressful," Chavez-Chavez said. "My friends all supported me and pushed me. I stayed after school and met with teachers. I don't miss as much school. Now I have good grades, As and Bs."

Claggett Creek eighth grader Betsy Serpas Quintanilla, who went from making mostly Cs to As and Bs, also wanted



Chavez-Chavez



Warner



Quintanilla

to be a good influence on her younger siblings.

"I want to be a model to my little sisters," Quintanilla said. "They say that the little siblings always follow your footsteps so I want to make sure they do good as well."

Quintanilla has roles models of her own in her mom who took care of the family when her dad left and her older sister, Sarai, who is finishing up nursing school in El Salvador.

Quintanilla wants to be a lawyer and thought if she was going to go through that much school, she might as well begin to enjoy it. Playing soccer and volleyball and running track and field, Quintanilla also needs good grades for athletics.

Whiteaker eighth grader Matthew Warner had behavioral and academic issues, spending most of the seventh grade in the principal's office while failing many of his classes.

After going to counseling during the summer, Warner decided to make a change.

"I thought I should stop do-

ing what I was doing and start actually acting like a grownup," Warner said. "I stopped fighting with people and started listening to the teachers."

Warner, who now makes mostly As and Bs, has also found classes he enjoys like computers, shop and foods.

"I really didn't like people and I didn't like teachers be-

cause I didn't like school at all," Warner said. "Now I really like school because I have all my friends here and I get to hang out with them more often."

The 23rd Annual Turnaround Achievement Awards were sponsored by Town & Country Lanes. The recipients were honored at a banquet on May 16 at Keizer Civic Center.



Submitted
Twenty students from each of the middle and high schools in Salem-Keizer were honored at the 2017 Turnaround Achievement Awards on May 16 at the Keizer Civic Center.

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