



22nd ANNIVERSARY

2020 Youth Awards

Presented by: **Hispanic Heritage** FOUNDATION and its Sponsors

**BLUE REGION – Delaware, District of Columbia,
Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania,
Virginia and West Virginia**

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MESSAGE FROM
JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO
PRESIDENT & CEO
HISPANIC HERITAGE FOUNDATION



We are thrilled to honor yet another outstanding class of Youth Awardees who will carry on the tradition of vision, commitment, social impact, and “ganas” from past recipients. There is no shortage of Latinx talent across the United States, and our Youth Awardees are all living proof. We are grateful to our dedicated sponsors who understand the importance of investing in the youngest and most dynamic segment of our population. We are in good hands with these outstanding young leaders going forward and believe these are the young leaders of today, not tomorrow. We can’t afford to wait. Following their lead, we will help meet America’s priorities in education, the community and the workforce.

Paz,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'T' followed by a long horizontal stroke that loops back under the 'T'.

Jose Antonio Tijerino

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DIEGO ELÍAS

GOLD

Major: Economics, Mathematics, and Statistics

GPA: 3.98

High School: Blacksburg High School

Heritage: Peruvian

“My first interest in business and finance came from my parents,” says Diego, whose parents met while working at a bank in Washington, D.C. As he got older, his mother became an Economics professor and his father an economic consultant, so Diego grew up learning about the fields and cultivating a love for them thanks to his parents. When he got to high school, he sought every opportunity to continue expanding his business and finance knowledge base. Most recently, he has gained hands-on finance experience by helping his dad with keeping track of the profit and operating costs of his small motorcycle business. Diego has conducted research regarding economic incentives for fighting climate change and ways to improve the healthcare system’s efficiency along with professors from Radford University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Last year, he was accepted to the Virginia Summer Residential Governor’s School for STEM and the Virginia Aerospace Science and Technology Scholars Program, a residential summer academy at the NASA Langley Research Center. Diego is a member of his school’s chapters of the National Honor Society and the Science National Honor Society. He has a 3.98 GPA and is among the top students in his class. He has been recognized for his academic achievements and research, receiving the Rotary Academic Achievement Award, the College Board National Hispanic Recognition, and the award for Best Environmental Research by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to name a few. He plans on studying Economics, Mathematics, and Statistics at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Virginia, or Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

ISABELLA MONROY

SILVER

Major: Operations Management and Business Analytics

GPA: 3.77

High School: North County High School

Heritage: Puerto Rican and Guatemalan

Of Puerto Rican and Guatemalan descent, Isabella has been taking business classes as part of her school's International Trade, Transportation and Tourism Program since the beginning of her high school career. The program has given her the chance to explore possible career pathways and delve into topics revolving around business leadership and management, finance and economics, and international business, among others. Beginning her junior year, Isabella has been dual-enrolled at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland, where she has continued to learn about the world of business through classes like Transportation and Logistics and Supply Chain Management. Upon graduation, she will have completed 18 dual-enrollment credits and will receive a Transportation, Logistics and Cargo Security certificate. Devoted to community service and youth leadership, Isabella serves as Historian of her school's Spanish National Honor Society and is a member of its National Honor Society and Key Club. Since 2017, she has been a dedicated and loyal volunteer at Sarah's House, a local supportive housing program for homeless families. Isabella wants to make a difference as a woman and a leader in business. She will attend the University of Maryland, George Washington University, or New York University, where she will study Operations Management and Business Analytics.

JAMES RAMOS

BRONZE

Major: Biology, Finance, and/or Computer Science

GPA: 3.76

High School: Regis High School

Heritage: Peruvian

When James visited New York City for the first time as a fifth-grader, he felt like he had stepped into another universe. “Gone were the grandmas walking to the bodega in their chanclas and 99-cent store clothing,” he recalls. They had been replaced by people in suits, hailing cabs and entering huge buildings. Curious about what these professionals did for a living, he discovered they were businesspeople. “I admired their lifestyle. I enjoyed watching them as they talked to each other over coffee at Starbucks or as they rushed to catch the 8 o’clock train. I wanted that fast-paced lifestyle,” James says. As he matured, he wondered more about the jobs these people had than about their lifestyles, so he set a goal for himself: to devote an entire month to learning about finance. In that month, he taught himself about the stock market, finance majors, domestic and international economics, foreign exchange, and cryptocurrencies. He also discovered how much he enjoyed the intricacies of the field, its problem solving and analysis. After learning that his school did not have a Finance Club, he started his own. Thanks to his efforts, today, his club is a major activity at his school. It hosts guest lectures, is involved in competitions, and has well-established interscholastic relationships. James is also highly active outside of school. He sees serving his community as a formative, life-changing experience through which he can positively impact those around him. A proud Latino leader, he sees it as his duty to serve his community to enable the next generations of Latino leaders to pursue their dreams without impediments. James is a National Hispanic Scholar, a National Merit Commended Scholar, and a QuestBridge National College Match Finalist. He is President of his school’s Medical Science Club, Captain of its Science Bowl and its CyberPatriot Team, as well as Committee Member of its Computer Club. He will attend Cornell University, Harvard University, or Johns Hopkins University and study Biology, Finance and/or Computer Science.

LOURDES ARTEAGA BAEZA

GOLD

Major: Secondary Education with a specialization in English or Speech Hearing and Language

GPA: 4.00

High School: Bethesda Chevy Chase High School

Heritage: Mexican

Lourdes learned English through songs. “Party in the USA” was the first song Mrs. Dabbs, her ESL teacher, taught her when she first moved to the US. Though initially overwhelmed by the speed of the words as they blended into the melody, Mrs. Dabbs put her at ease. She knelt next to Lourdes and walked her through the lyrics as she sang, pointing to the words and highlighting them as Lourdes added them to her vocabulary. As the list of highlighted words grew, the verses in the song revealed their meaning. “The character in the song had moved, just like me. She was okay, and I knew I would be too,” recalls Lourdes. With her patience, Mrs. Dabbs had opened a new world for her and, in doing so, had inspired her to do the same for others. Lourdes now helps adults who have recently moved to the US learn to communicate effectively in English by working as a Beginning Literacy Level ESL teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Bethesda, Maryland. At her school, she mentors and tutors students embarking on the journey to learn Spanish as part of their Peer Partner system. She also helps students in their journey to learn French as a member of her school’s French Honor Society. “In all of my students, I see myself, someone who has stories to tell but doesn’t have the words yet,” she says. So she does as Mrs. Dabbs did, turns to music as a teaching tool, and guides her students as they learn new words through songs. Serving her community is central to Lourdes’s high school experience. As a volunteer at the Leaders Institute, she visits different high schools daily to give presentations empowering students to become leaders in their communities. With a host of IB classes in her schedule and a 4.0 GPA, Lourdes stands among the top in her class. She wants to study Secondary Education with a specialization in English or Speech Hearing and Language. She will attend the University of Maryland, Loyola University Maryland, or Fordham University.

ASHLEY ISCOA

SILVER

Major: Secondary Education with a specialization in ESL with a minor in Spanish

GPA: 3.83

High School: Harrisonburg High School

Heritage: Honduran

During Ashley's junior year, two teachers influenced her decision to want to become an educator: her Honors English instructor, Mrs. Strickler, and Mrs. Shiftlet, an ESL teacher who Ashley met in 10th grade while conducting an interview for her school's newspaper. Mrs. Strickler took an interest in Ashley when she noticed she was struggling in class. Aware of her abilities and refusing to see her fail, Mrs. Strickler pushed and motivated Ashley to succeed, unlike any other teacher had ever done for her. She never hesitated to help, even if it meant staying around after school to guide Ashley through an assignment. ESL teacher Mrs. Shiftlet gave Ashley the opportunity to work as her class assistant. By doing so, she gave her a chance to meet students from different backgrounds and gain a deeper understanding and love of the diversity and richness of her Hispanic heritage as she taught students about American customs and guided them through English lessons. The most fulfilling aspect of this experience for Ashley was seeing the progress her students made. "Being able to witness their growth was amazing, especially when they moved on to the next level in English," she recalls. Thanks to Mrs. Shiftlet, she realized the kind of teacher she wanted to be: dedicated, compassionate, and interested in her students, not just as students, but as people who matter. Through the experience Mrs. Shiftlet granted her, she learned how fulfilling and enriching being a teacher can be. Ashley is a member of her school's soccer and indoor track teams. Currently, she serves as Student Council Association President and works hard to ensure her school's diverse population is included in the programs she helps organize. She will major in Secondary Education with a specialization in ESL and minor in Spanish at Christopher Newport University, Pennsylvania State University, or James Madison University.

CATHERINE CONTRERAS

BRONZE

Major: Special Education

GPA: 3.75

High School: Thomas Sprigg Wootton High School

Heritage: Venezuelan and Colombian

Though education has always been an important part of Catherine's life, she had never considered becoming a teacher until she had the opportunity to intern in a special education class as a freshman. "This educational internship really helped me find who I truly am, and what I want to do in life, which is helping others," she says. Now a senior, she has interned with the special education program at her school throughout her high school career and has become passionate about advocating for the inclusion of special needs students. On behalf of her school's special education program, she has spoken to the Maryland Board of Education about the need for renovations at her school due to non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. She currently serves as Co-President of her school's Best Buddies club and has organized several events to help all members of her school establish meaningful friendships, feel included and welcome. It was through her involvement with the club that she originally had the opportunity to work with her school's special education program. Best Buddies has impacted Catherine in ways she never imagined. It helped her learn about herself and about friendship and happiness. Her advocacy and her commitment to promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities have garnered Catherine several recognitions, including the Montgomery County Council of PTAs Special Education Outstanding Student Award, the City of Rockville Martin Luther King Jr. Award for helping advance the goals and dreams of Dr. King, and her induction into her school's Hall of Fame, making her the first Latina in the history of her high school to earn this recognition. This inspiring young leader will attend West Virginia University, Syracuse University, or the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she plans to pursue a degree in Special Education.

KATHRINE COWART

GOLD

Major: Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Bioengineering

GPA: 3.85

High School: Unionville High School

Heritage: Spanish

“Attached to my house is a twenty by thirty room where magic happens,” says Kathrine. What to others may be an unassuming, ordinary garage from the outside is her creative sanctuary and workspace, where she grew up making her own furniture and creating and fixing all sorts of things with her father. With lathes, drills, welders and steel tables along its perimeter and larger pieces of equipment like planers and workstations in the middle of the room, this is where she learned to use all the machines she loves. “This is where my love for engineering started,” she declares. Kathrine knows that knowledge of advanced math and science is often necessary during the design and implementation of an engineering project. To help develop her skills, she has taken multiple advanced placement classes, including AP Calculus and Physics. She has also taken courses in Engineering/CAD Drafting and Wood and Metal Technology. What Kathrine enjoys the most about working on an engineering project is the problem-solving involved. “The complexity of those problems is a struggle and a fascination for me. I derive great satisfaction out of creating solutions to seemingly unsolvable mechanical situations,” she says. She has been putting her problem-solving skills to test and developing ingenious solutions by working as a part-time truck mechanic since 2015. Kathrine gives back to her community through her work at Creekside Preserve. Creekside Preserve came to life as an effort to save over 70 acres of land from deforestation in Big Elk Creek, Chester County, Pennsylvania. In 2016, Kathrine formed a team to plant a 2-acre fruit and nut trees orchard in the Preserve. Harvest from this orchard now supplies fruits and nuts to local populations in need through the Kennett Area Community Services Food Cupboard. Kathrine wants to major in Mechanical Engineering and minor in Bioengineering. She will be attending Carnegie Mellon University, Cornell University, or the University of Pittsburgh.

SARA ELKILANY

SILVER

Major: Biomedical Engineering

GPA: 4.00

High School: Al-Ghazaly Jr/Sr High School

Heritage: Colombian and Brazilian

Last year, Sara took on the role as a medical interpreter for her family when one of her cousins had to undergo multiple surgeries to treat a subdural hematoma. Of Colombian and Brazilian descent, she would take the English words from the doctors and turn them into Spanish and Portuguese to keep her family informed on her cousin's status and progress. The terminology was complex, so she spent hours studying vocabulary and treatment methods to learn all she could to help her family as much as possible. After being exposed to the biomedical engineering field, she applied for a hands-on bioengineering course at a local college. "As I held a scalpel during the first lab, I felt the irresistible tug of possibility," remembers Sara. "As paradoxical as it may seem, there is something undeniably humane about an artificial heart. Sculpted by human ingenuity, the inanimate device gives life to another being," she explains. Sara experienced that same feeling of possibility when she worked at Sharma Lab at the Stevens Institute of Technology. With a 4.0 GPA, Sara's scholastic achievements are indisputable. She has received several academic awards and recognitions, including being recognized as a National Hispanic Program Scholar by the College Board, being named an AP Scholar with Distinction, and being a QuestBridge National College Match Finalist. Sara's outstanding academics only tell part of her story. She also has an unwavering commitment to advocating for tolerance, equality, and justice through her everyday life. She strives to fight against inequalities in her community by getting involved and serving in any way she can. Sara wants to dedicate her life to developing safer treatments and techniques to help patients like her cousin. She will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rutgers University, or Columbia University, where she will study Biomedical Engineering.

DANIEL HEITZ

BRONZE

Major: Aerospace or Aeronautical Engineering

GPA: 4.00

High School: Ideaventions Academy for Mathematics and Science

Heritage: Venezuelan

Daniel began his work in aeronautics in the 8th grade, when he designed the “Super Phantom,” a 3D model of a transonic unmanned aerial vehicle. He has since continued to expand both his knowledge and his curiosity. Daniel excels in all academic areas, be they in traditional learning environments or independent settings. He has a wide range of STEM interests, from automobiles to military aviation, from fluid dynamics to artificial intelligence. Throughout his high school career, Daniel has followed a rigorous course of study that has included seven AP STEM classes and intensive coursework in the humanities. Besides being academically gifted, he is also a caring and dependable person and makes impactful contributions at school, home, and in his community. He enjoys tutoring his classmates and helping clear up any problems or questions they may have with concepts or material covered in class. He is responsible for his grandfather’s care at home, looking out for his well-being and physical health. “I enjoy trying to make him happy because he loves me very much,” explains Daniel. At church, he offers to help the Director of Youth Minister every opportunity he can, whether it be leading retreats or participating in biblical reenactments. Daniel has been working as a technical intern with systems and software engineers at Northrop Grumman since the summer of 2019. To be a better asset, he taught himself C++, HTML, and BASH scripting. He is the first high school student to have interned in his capacity and is paving the way for additional high school student interns thanks to his attitude and contributions. Daniel stops at nothing to pursue his curiosities. He has taught himself blacksmithing, the mechanics of short-selling, fluid dynamics, and Japanese, among others. He is not afraid of embracing challenges and is creative, attentive, dedicated, and enthusiastic about learning. This exceptional Latino has a 4.0 GPA and has been recognized numerous times for his achievements. Some of his recognitions include earning 1st place at the American Mathematics Competition AMC-12 level, placing him among the top 10% of competitors worldwide, being recognized as an AP Scholar with Distinction, and being a National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist. He will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Virginia, or Pennsylvania State University and pursue an Aerospace or Aeronautical Engineering degree.

ALBERT LACAZE

GOLD

Major: Business, Technology and Entrepreneurship

GPA: 3.42

High School: Miami Northwestern Senior High School

Heritage: Filipino and Uruguayan

First-generation American with Uruguayan and Filipino roots, Albert took on his first endeavor as an entrepreneur during a snowy middle school winter season. He and his brother had already been making money for a few years by shoveling snow out of their neighbors' driveways and sidewalks. Thinking of a way to increase their profits and aware that they could only work on a few houses per day before the sun came down, Albert proposed they pool their money to buy a snow blower. He knew they could work faster and that working with a snow blower would add credibility to their endeavor and make them look more professional, ensuring they could gain more clients. Though it took some convincing, his brother got on board with his idea. That winter, they almost quadrupled their previous seasons' average profits. His leadership and his entrepreneurial spirit have guided him since. For the last seven years, Albert has been captain of his robotics team. He has guided his team from its humble beginnings, before they competed at all, onto representing the US in international competitions. His team invented and owns the patent to an ecosystem for methane conversion and emissions reductions. They propose their invention as a low-cost solution to aid with the global problem of atmospheric methane accumulation. Albert's latest project is a bitcoin-like cryptocurrency, which he is currently in the process of patenting. He plans to have his cryptocurrency used by students everywhere to make purchases on school grounds and intends on donating a percentage of each exchange transaction from crypto to fiat to the endowment of each student's respective school. A leader among his peers, Albert enjoys helping those around him succeed and often seeks opportunities to mentor other robotics teams as they prepare to compete, even if they are his own team's contenders. "By reaching out to give a helping hand, we all win at the end," says Albert. He plans on studying Business, Technology and Entrepreneurship and will attend Indiana University Bloomington, New York University, or the University of Maryland.

ERIC ROBLES

SILVER

Major: Entrepreneurship

GPA: 3.95

High School: Wakefield High School

Heritage: Salvadoran

“For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed learning about immigrants that came to the United States and succeeded in business,” says Eric, a first-generation American of Salvadoran descent. The idea of starting small and taking risks to grow a successful business from scratch inspires him. Eric’s favorite book is *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie*. Learning about the hardships Carnegie while growing up and how he overcame obstacles in order to help his family and his community grow motivated Eric. “Carnegie was able to show his love and admiration for his community by employing his financial resources to provide jobs for thousands of Americans and creating community buildings for everyone to use,” he tells us. His goal is to one day do for his own family and community the equivalent of what Carnegie did generations ago. He is eager to learn what it takes to become an entrepreneur and open up an innovative business. Eric is a model student. He maintains a 3.95 GPA and has challenged himself throughout his high school career by enrolling in demanding AP courses and getting involved in a number of extracurricular activities. One of his missions is to always seek new opportunities to get involved and help his community. For the last couple of years, he has been volunteering at a local food bank. He is a devoted and responsible son and helps support his family financially by working up to 30 hours at a restaurant every week. When new regulations were set at the beginning of the pandemic and his job faced the possibility of closing down, Eric played an important role in coming up with solutions and a plan of action to ensure they remained open and that they saved as many jobs as they could. Eric plans on pursuing an Entrepreneurship degree. He will be attending the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

DANIELA PÉREZ

BRONZE

Major: Political Science with a minor in Economics

GPA: 3.56

High School: Northwest High School

Heritage: Cuban and Venezuelan

In 2018, Gaithersburg, Maryland resident Daniela pioneered Culture Fest, her school's first-ever festival dedicated to celebrating the cultural diversity in her community. She has been advocating for the celebration and the inclusion of minority populations since elementary school. Daniela's elementary school had an Asperger's inclusion program. When she was in 5th grade, her class was the "buddy class" that hosted students in the Asperger's program in an effort to make them feel welcome and help them develop friendships. However, Daniela soon noticed her classmates treated the guest students differently and were not very welcoming. Examining the situation, she realized she shared something in common with the visiting students; "we were two minorities who only ever wanted to be seen for who we are, not what we are," recognized Daniela. Ever since, she has fought to create inclusive environments for all in her community, whether they are of a different cultural background or have a disability. Daniela is a talented and committed community leader. She has handled various leadership roles within her school's Minority Scholars Program, a student-led program aimed at closing the achievement gap in her community. This past summer, she served as the program's intern and helped discuss racial issues and tensions and how to combat them within her county. Her community involvement and advocacy work have made her the recipient of many honors and recognitions. She was named Honorary Council Member for a Day within her school district and was chosen to represent her school at her county's Superintendent's Leadership Academy. Daniela has also participated in the University of Maryland's Future Women in Business Conference. She hopes she can serve as an elected official one day and plans to continue her community work by establishing her own non-profit organization. She will major in Political Science and minor in Economics at George Washington University, American University, or Montgomery College.

ANGELA JACDEDT

GOLD

Major: Biology or Pre-Medicine

GPA: 4.00

High School: Morris Hills High School

Heritage: Colombian

Angela has been fascinated by how the human body works since childhood. While growing up, as she tried to find the answers to how our bodies function and enable us to survive and thrive, her Google search was filled with questions like: “How can I walk?” and “How do diseases work, and how do we get sick?” When Angela’s grandfather was diagnosed with liver cancer, she looked for ways in which she could help him. “I hoped and prayed that I could somehow take his pain away,” she recalls. Although it was a devastating time for her and her family, this is when Angela began her dive into biology and chemistry studies, investigating medical procedures and surgeries and cultivating what would become her greatest passion: learning about medicine. Angela wants to become a surgeon and has taken various courses to prepare for her future career, including AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Psychology, and Anatomy and Physiology. She enjoys helping others and being of service in her community. “Volunteering was definitely the highlight of my final years in high school,” she says. Currently, she volunteers at the Breast Imaging Center of the Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck, New Jersey, where she helps patients and staff with kindness and compassion. Angela is committed to academic excellence. She is among the top 5% students in her class, maintains a 4.0 GPA, and is a member of her school’s chapters of the National Honor Society, the Spanish Honor Society, the Mathematics Honor Society, and the Science National Honor Society. She will attend the University of Connecticut, Pennsylvania State University, or the University of Maryland, where she will study Biology or Pre-Medicine.

CLARENCE RAMÍREZ

SILVER

Major: Biology or Biomedical Engineering

GPA: 4.00

High School: Osbourn Park High School

Heritage: Filipino

Clarence has been captivated by the human body from the moment he stuck his four-year-old ears into a stethoscope and heard his heartbeat. “I live and breathe the health sciences,” proclaims this Bristow, Virginia resident of Filipino descent. Much of his passion for medicine was born out of seeing many of his family members battle cancer and other diseases. “These are constant threats to all of us, and my instinctive nature to bring about change and solutions to these bearing issues we face has set me upon my academic path towards one day becoming a physician,” says Clarence. He knows he can make a positive impact as a doctor and works daily to manifest this dream. During his freshman year, Clarence applied for the Biotechnology Program at his school while simultaneously taking Project Lead the Way’s Principles of Biomedical Science courses. His sophomore year, he became Vice President of his school’s Health Occupations Students of America club. Clarence began working as a Novant Health Volunteer at the Prince William Medical Center and was accepted into Virginia’s Summer Residential Governor’s School for Medicine and Health Sciences during his junior year. Upon graduation, Clarence finds fulfillment by giving back to his community. He has helped organize school fundraisers and provide care packages for the homeless as Class Representative in his school’s Student Council Association. Serving as Secretary of his school’s chapter of Humanity First for the last almost three years, he has organized drives to raise money for Hurricane Dorian victims and Humanity First’s Water for Life Initiative, which provides clean water to some of the world’s most impoverished communities. Clarence is all-around exceptional. He is ranked 2nd out of 570 students in his class and has amassed a lengthy collection of accomplishments, including becoming a State Finalist in the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow Challenge, placing 1st in the Clear Air Partners Science Competition, and being inducted into the Youth Conservation Leadership Institute. He will attend Harvard University, Yale University, or Stanford University and pursue a Biology or Biomedical Engineering degree.

ISABELLA SERRANO

BRONZE

Major: Chemical Engineering with a minor in Spanish

GPA: 4.0

High School: Dr. Ronald E. McNair Academic High School

Heritage: Puerto Rican

Well before Isabella knew what she wanted to study in college, she was certain of one thing, her love for all things STEM. Math and science came almost naturally to her, and she always excelled in her courses. Isabella found her passion in her Honors Chemistry course her freshman year. “It explained the unexplainable,” she recalls. Because of the course’s level of difficulty, it is uncommon to have 9th graders taking Honors Chemistry at her high school. But Isabella had no problems with the material in the course. In fact, she achieved the highest average out of all the students enrolled in the class in her school that year. During the summer of 2019, Isabella explored sustainable living options and learned about the environmental impact of plastic and other non-renewable resources while on a research trip to Germany and Switzerland. Inspired to make a change, she helped pass the plastic bag ban in Jersey City just a few weeks after arriving from her trip. Isabella signed up to take AP Environmental Science her junior year and continued learning about the negative impact we have on the environment. “I realized how detrimental global warming is. That’s when I knew I had to do something about it. With so many non-renewable resources being exploited as a form of convenience and a way to gain wealth, there has to be a way to save our planet and make alternatives,” says Isabella. Her goal is to become a chemical engineer in order to find a way for us to solve our plastic waste problem. Isabella wants to share her passion for science with others and volunteers at Latinas in STEM conventions to inspire younger Latinas to pursue careers in STEM. She also helped promote positive change in her community through her work as a member of the Jersey City Youth Counsel, where she advocated for restorative justice, rehabilitation, and juvenile justice reform. Last year, Isabella was selected as a New Jersey Governor’s STEM Scholar, an honor reserved for her state’s most promising and accomplished high school and college students. With a 4.0 GPA, this outstanding Boricua plans on majoring in Chemical Engineering and minoring in Spanish at Northeastern University, the University of Michigan, or Rutgers University–New Brunswick.

MELISSA REYES

GOLD

Major: Government with a minor in Media Studies

GPA: 3.92

High School: Passaic Preparatory Academy

Heritage: Mexican

Passaic, New Jersey resident Melissa, became a storyteller as a way to take matters into her own hands upon seeing the lack of diversity in the media and the entertainment industry. “The fact that I can tell other people’s stories, struggles, and hopes through different forms of media is exhilarating,” she says. From writing articles to sharing information via video chyron, Melissa learned about the multitude of platforms she can use to express her ideas and share other people’s experiences in her journalism classes. As Editor-in-Chief of The Boulevard and The Boulevard Online, her school’s newspaper and its online media site, she is in charge of helping student reporters, guiding and mentoring them so they can reach their full potential as journalists. One of her missions as a journalist is to reduce media distrust by reporting events that interest and affect everyone in her community. Working as a journalist has given Melissa the opportunity to elevate voices and disseminate the stories of people and communities that might otherwise not be heard. Her freshman year, she interviewed Japanese-Americans who lived through the Japanese internment camps of World War II for her entry into her school’s National History Day competition. Her exhibit titled “Japanese Internment Camps: America Attacking Their Own” won her school’s competition. It then went on to win the state competition and on to represent New Jersey at the national level in Washington DC. Melissa is the first person to make a documentary on the life and work of Sandra Ramos, the founder of the first women’s shelter in the US. “I felt empowered as I was telling people about her life, helping bring recognition to her dedication to helping women fleeing from domestic violence,” shares Melissa. She serves as the Vice President of the Passaic Youth Council and continually advocates for other young people in her city to engage in political and social justice issues. Melissa is a QuestBridge Match Scholarship recipient. She will attend Dartmouth College on a full-ride scholarship. Melissa wants to major in Government and minor in Media Studies. She is the first student in her school to be admitted into an Ivy League University and will be the first in her family to attend college.

ARIANNA MOSQUEDA

SILVER

Major: Media Communications with a minor in Dance

GPA: 4.00

High School: William Monroe High School

Heritage: Mexican

Arianna always volunteers to take on the role of editor and director whenever there is a video project assignment at her school. Her freshman year, she was in charge of editing a video on the bubonic plague for her World History class. In 10th grade, Arianna edited a video that introduced the chloroplasts of a cell as presidential candidates. Last year, she received commendations for an informational video she created for her AP Computer Science Principles class, where she highlighted the importance of coding and included student interviews where they talked about their experiences learning to code. For Arianna, making and editing videos is a creative outlet. "These projects have allowed me to express my creativity in creating media entertainment, and I've been able to use this creative outlet to establish aspirations for my future as a potential filmmaker," she says. Besides video projects for school, she also enjoys just making videos for the sake of making videos. She is continuously coming up with new concepts and creating her own film projects. She likes exploring and recreating cinematography and concepts from major films and also working on varied skits. Her freshman year, Arianna took an Intro to Film class where she learned the basics of cinematography. Through the class, she studied filmmaking techniques, such as camera angles and movements and how these can influence the audience's perception and understanding of a film. She realized she was instinctually already using many of the techniques she learned in class before formally learning about them. She had always had a knack for filmmaking, and the class served as confirmation. Arianna is a member of her school's Beta Club chapter and loves giving back to her community. Thanks to her involvement with the club, she has volunteered at her local library and has tutored at elementary schools in her district. Arianna is a role model to her peers for her community involvement and her high academics. She has a 4.0 GPA and stands among the top 3% of students in her class. More important to Arianna, is being a role model to her six-year-old younger sister. She considers helping raise her to be her proudest accomplishment. Last year, when schools switched to virtual learning, Arianna took on the responsibility of helping her little sister with school as she adjusted to the changes. Thanks to her dedication, her sister won the Outstanding Virtual Learner Award for her class. Arianna's own achievements provide something for her sister to aspire to, but the fact that she is willing to help her sister in her own endeavors says a great deal about her character. Arianna serves as the Social Media Specialist intern for the Charlottesville Initiative for Social Practice through the Arts Visual Arts. She will attend Swarthmore College, Pomona College, or the University of Virginia. She wants to major in Media Communications and minor in Dance.

ALYSSA YOU

BRONZE

Major: Film Production with a minor in Business Entrepreneurship

GPA: 4.00

High School: Cedar Crest High School

Heritage: Puerto Rican and Cambodian

Alyssa fell in love with the filmmaking process in her Broadcast Video Production class her sophomore year. For Mr. Schwalm, her teacher, Alyssa simply took the class by storm. "It was clear from day one that she has a special talent with the visual arts ... [and] is organized, responsible, and has an incredible work ethic. This combination makes her one of the most promising film students our program has seen in its 20-year existence," affirms Mr. Schwalm. As part of an assignment for this class, Alyssa took on the challenge of making a music video. She obtained permission to use Billy Eilish's "When the Party's Over" from Moxie, cast two characters, and filmed the piece entirely independently. What she submitted was of such quality that Mr. Schwalm selected it for submission for Emmy consideration. Alyssa's video won the 2020 Emmy for the Mid-Atlantic High School Production Awards in the Music Video Category. The caliber of her work has continued to grow over the past three years in the program. Alyssa's films are featured among the "2020 Official Selections" of the All American High School Film Festival. She was selected for the Horror/Sci-Fi/Fantasy category with "Not Good Enough" and the 2020 Quarantine Diaries category with "My Quarantine Diary." Last year, she also worked on a film entirely under lockdown conditions, which she submitted for consideration to the Black Country Lockdown Film Festival. Her film was selected as a finalist and is featured on a special volume DVD of the "Quarantine Collection" released nationwide by the Meridian Releasing Group. Alyssa's films tend to not only be entertaining, they also focus on important themes, adding a layer of meaning to her work. She has had the opportunity to shadow and learn from established filmmaker, writer, director and producer, Sarah Schwab. Working with Schwab has inspired Alyssa. "When speaking to Sarah, my goals became realistic, and she voiced her support for the success of my career. Women have always been underrepresented, not only in the entertainment industry, but also in society. It's time to change that, and I want to be a force behind the change," she expressed. She wants to help bring more diversity beyond her own films and into the entertainment industry as a whole. Besides her creative work, Alyssa is highly active in her community through her work as a member of her school's Key Club and National Honor Society chapters. She is also captain of her school's field hockey team, has a 4.0 GPA, and is among the top 4% students in her class. She will major in Film Production and minor in Business Entrepreneurship at Pennsylvania State University, Chapman University, or the University of Southern California.

SITA KOTILIL

GOLD

Major: Biology with a minor in International Relations

GPA: 3.94

High School: Walter Johnson High School

Heritage: Venezuelan and Indian

“People want to be heard,” says Bethesda, Maryland resident Sita. “A striking problem—even in local politics—is that they are not,” she adds. For Sita, getting involved in politics was a way for her to become the intermediary between the people and those in charge. She dedicates her summers to volunteering for political candidates whose beliefs align with her own, canvassing, phone banking, and advocating alongside her peers for issues that matter to them. Her work has made her realize that political races are not just about winning, but also about providing citizens with the best representation to make their lives easier and their issues resolved. “I learned my first lesson in politics: it starts and ends with the constituent,” she says. One of the issues that concern Sita is school shootings, so two years ago, she created a user-friendly public online database where people can track school shootings along with the stance of the respective elected officials of each affected state on the matter of gun control. Another issue that matters to her is our nation’s drug addiction epidemic. To gain a better understanding of the problem and offer her support, Sita volunteers at the HIPS clinic in Washington, DC. HIPS is a non-profit organization that, among many much-needed community services, provides help to people suffering from substance abuse problems. Sita has also conducted independent medical research on topics relevant to our society today. Last year, she was selected to present her finding on Hepatitis C treatment, specifically as it refers to resource-limited countries, to top physicians and public health experts, at the Liver Meeting 2020 and Infectious Diseases Week 2020. Sita is a National AP Scholar and a National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar. She has a 3.94 GPA and is member of her school’s chapter of the National Honor Society. She will attend the University of Maryland, Yale University, or Georgetown University, where she will major in Biology and minor in International Relations.

ALESSANDRO IAIA

SILVER

Major: Government with a minor in Latin American Studies

GPA: 4.00

High School: Charter School Of Wilmington

Heritage: Mexican and Italian

For Alessandro, passing laws that support ALL communities is how we can ensure we are working towards improving the lives of all people in the country. He is eager to be involved in the political process and has not allowed his young age to be an impediment for him in his efforts to create change. "I do believe that with organization, passion, and diligent self-will, we can set forward the machine of change; I believe that in our actions, speeches, and votes, we can protect the communities which have long been disenfranchised by the dangers of polarizing politics and ignorant racism," proclaims Alessandro. As a first-generation American, son to a Mexican mother and an Italian father, Alessandro feels he has a duty, a moral obligation, to defend the rights of immigrants like his parents. By fighting for the disenfranchised and the underrepresented, he also feels like he is paying back a debt of gratitude to those that have fought for people like him to have a voice. Alessandro serves as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Prevention & Advocacy Department at the Latin American Community Center of Wilmington, Delaware. He is the founder and President of his school's Hispanic Outreach Club, which he established to help his peers find opportunities to learn, volunteer, and be of service to the Latinx community of his city. He is also co-founder and co-director of the Asian Hispanic Empowerment Organization (AHEO), an international non-profit dedicated to ending racism by educating the youth about the importance of accepting and respecting diversity and all different cultures. Through AHEO, Alessandro has been able to reach and teach hundreds of children around the world about racism, with the hope that they may grow into young adults able to recognize and avoid the traps of normalized racism. This exceptional Latino leader has a 4.0 GPA. He is a member of his school's chapter of the National Honor Society and has received several recognitions for his achievements, including being recognized as an AP Scholar with Distinctions, being a Coca-Cola Scholars Semifinalist, and a recipient of the One in a Million Award from Multiplying Good's for his work with AHEO. He is still waiting to hear back from a few universities, and plans to major in Government and minor in Latin American Studies.

ANTONIO CLEMENTE

BRONZE

Major: Political Science with a minor in Spanish

GPA: 3.92

High School: Regis High School

Heritage: Cuban, Spanish, and Italian

Antonio wants to become an immigration lawyer. Last August, he joined a team of students in a virtual immersion program hosted by the Kino Border Initiative, a non-profit organization focused on humanitarian assistance, education, and advocacy as they relate to immigration. Inspired by their commitment to social advocacy, last fall, Antonio facilitated interviews with immigrants and set up letter-writing campaigns to representatives, calling for the protection of asylum seekers. He met with several immigration lawyers who explained to him the tough legal process, told him the stories that inspired them to defend immigrants, and what his organization at school could do to help. Antonio's organization is his school's Spanish and Latin American Cultural Society (SLACS). Wanting to increase Latino representation and visibility at his school, he took on the mission to revitalize SLACS. What started as a space where students could learn about Latino culture through food, music, and conversation, soon evolved into a place where students could learn about issues affecting the Latino community in the US and be inspired to become advocates. "The club took on a new life; we discussed poverty, lack of accessibility to medicine and education, and the inhumane nature of the US immigration system," shares Antonio. His work to raise awareness through SLACS and his own family's immigration story are what inspired this Cuban, Spanish, Italian American to want to dedicate his life to fighting for and defending immigrants. "In supporting others, I found purpose; I'm honoring my family's sacrifice and defending the quality of life that all immigrants deserve," he proclaims. Evidence of his commitment to hard work, Antonio has a stellar academic record and a 3.92 GPA. He is a member of his school's Speech and Debate team, as well as of many of its clubs, including the Young Republicans and Democrats Club, Philosophy Club, Economics Club, and Heritage, its multicultural club. He plans on attending Vanderbilt University, Georgetown University, or Rice University, where he will major in Political Science and minor in Spanish.

ALEJANDRA HOY

GOLD

Major: Environmental Studies or Urban Studies

GPA: 4.00

High School: Poolesville High School

Heritage: Peruvian

Gaithersburg, Maryland resident of Peruvian descent, Alejandra balances out her demanding academic schedule to find the time to be an advocate for causes that matter to her. As Vice President of her school's Amnesty International Club chapter, she has been active in learning about and helping educate her peers on abuses of human rights happening worldwide and has been able to contribute to the movements that fight against such human rights violations through chapter-sponsored events. Alejandra serves as Co-President of her school's Peacemakers and Problem Solvers Club (PMPS). Through PMPS, she helps her peers develop their leadership and problem-solving abilities by connecting them to students in Colombia so they can work together to identify humanitarian issues and collaborate on solutions. Alejandra is actively involved in her local Girl Scouts chapter. She is also a member of her school's chapters of the National Spanish Honor Society and the Foundation for the International Medical Relief of Children, an organization that works to bring healthcare to medically underserved communities around the world. Alejandra wants to be a role model for other young Latinas. She believes the best way to empower the next generation is by leading and inspiring younger members of our community by example. "I think that the best way to inspire the younger generation is by pioneering and leading by example. Serving as role models for how people of Latino heritage can contribute to American society will encourage the younger generation and empower them to create positive, meaningful change," she asserts. Alejandra's proven service, leadership, and academic accomplishments are impressive. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and wants to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies or Urban Studies. She is a QuestBridge Match Scholarship recipient and will be attending Washington University in St. Louis on a full four-year scholarship.

SOFÍA SEPÚLVEDA

SILVER

Major: Political Science with a minor in History

GPA: 3.52

High School: Washington International School

Heritage: Colombian and Chilean

Proud of her heritage, Sofia has always referred to herself as a "Chilombamericana," in recognition of her Chilean, Colombian, and American roots. After a student at her school called her a derogatory term, Sofia sprung into action. To fight the problem of racism at her school, protect other Latinx students from experiencing it as she had, and provide them with a safe space, she founded her school's first Latinx Student Union. Throughout the years, her organization has grown and led assemblies to raise awareness about persistent social inequities and injustices faced by the Latinx community in the US. Aware of the importance of establishing clubs like hers in predominantly white institutions, Sofia and her classmates came together to create NExT, a collaboration with other independent schools to encourage diversity work. Last summer, when the Black Lives Matter movement was growing after the tragic murder of George Floyd, Sofia wanted her school to place a BLM banner in support. Knowing their history of not being proactive with race issues, Sofia purchased a banner herself. It now proudly and prominently hangs on her school's grounds. From volunteering at an arts center for kids to helping with food and clothing drives, serving others and being an active member of her community has been central to Sofia's high school experience. "[It] helped me step out of my comfort zone and gain new experiences that have shaped my meaning of life," she declares. For her involvement in organizing the NExT initiative, Sofia received her school's Community, Equity, and Justice Award. She was also recognized with the International Values Award for contributing to enriching her school's community by actively bringing people together. Sofia wants to major in Political Science and minor in History. She will attend Columbia University, Fordham University, or Temple University.

FRANCINE DÍAZ

BRONZE

Major: Political Science and Human Rights

GPA: 3.64

High School: Saint James School

Heritage: Ecuadorian

Francine's primary goal in life is to give a voice to those who may not be able to use their own. Last summer, she led a peaceful demonstration in Hoboken, New Jersey, to speak up and stand against police brutality episodes taking place across the nation. Francine is a passionate advocate for human rights and continuously works to empower her Latino community to fight for those that can't. She is well aware of the need to champion the cause of those less fortunate and strives to highlight the voices of the disenfranchised. Committed to volunteerism, she is always the first to sign up and help in any way possible. She maintains herself occupied by fully immersing herself into working for her community. As part of her volunteer work, she teaches students from underserved populations at Saint James the Less in Philadelphia, packs lunches for children in need of extra nourishment in the Hagerstown, Maryland area, and oversees the bean bag toss through the Kisseman Children's Foundation Easter Egg Hunt held at her school. Seeing the impact her time and effort had in her local community made Francine want to continue her work in her family's community down in Ecuador. She set up donation bins in her dormitory at school. "Most of the girls at the end of the year would throw out clothing that would make an Ecuadorian girl leap with joy," explains Francine. Once the school year was over, she spent countless hours sorting through donations, washing and allocating clothing. Prior to taking her trip to Ecuador, she shipped three hundred pounds of clothes for girls in many rural Ecuadorian villages. Once in Ecuador, she led English tutoring sessions for children in the Galápagos Islands. She plans on continuing to pursue her passion for service work by joining the Peace Corps after graduation. Francine is editor of her school's student newspaper, captain of its Speech and Debate team, and member of its Model UN club. She also a member of its Varsity Lacrosse and Varsity Field Hockey teams. Francine is a distinguished student with an uncanny ability to balance her extracurricular responsibilities with a rigorous academic schedule. She will attend Barnard College, New York University, Seton Hall University. She plans on pursuing degrees in Political Science and Human Rights and eventually becoming an immigration lawyer.

DIEGO VALENCIA

GOLD

Major: Mathematics and Neuroscience

GPA: 3.60

High School: Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

Heritage: Peruvian and Colombian

Diego's interest lies in the intersection of math with technology and science, particularly in applied mathematics and artificial intelligence. As one of the students admitted into the highly competitive Aspiring Scientists Summer Internship Program hosted by George Mason University for the last two years, Diego has dedicated his last two summers to carry out research using mathematical modeling and artificial intelligence algorithms to develop a discrete wearable device for opioid rehabilitation patients. Designed to detect physiological indicators of imminent relapse and provide real-time notification to not only the patient but to a counselor or family friend, his device will provide the opportunity for timely intervention and prevention. With his device, Diego aims to not only reduce relapse incidences but also prevent opioid overdoses. "Relapse often leads to death due to loss of tolerance after initial treatment. An intervention when relapse is imminent will not only improve lives in my community, it will save lives," elaborates Diego. In addition, he hopes his device will be a lower-cost alternative to intensive inpatient treatment, making it accessible to a broader population. Working on this project revealed to Diego the interdisciplinary nature of technology. Beginning with computational mathematics, he also had to learn the academic discipline of artificial intelligence and the application of machine learning to create computer algorithms that would provide his device the ability to access data and improve from experience. He also needed engineering and technology skills to create his device and had to learn about physiology and behavioral science to understand the need for and how to effectively use his device. He needed to learn about opioids and how they are misused, then had to learn about the effects of opioids on the brain, the heart, and behavior and about addiction and the triggers for relapses and overdose. Diego was one of the few high school students selected to give poster presentations and invited talks at mini-symposia on his research work at the 2019 Shenandoah Undergraduate Mathematics and Statistics Conference hosted by James Madison University, as well as the 2020 VII Workshop on Computational Data Analysis and Numerical Methods, an international conference traditionally held in Portugal. This remarkable young Latino scientist plans on pursuing degrees in Mathematics and Neuroscience at Harvard University, Harvey Mudd College, or the University of Virginia.

MEI VON KAENEL

SILVER

Major: : Computer Science, Economics, or Entrepreneurial Studies

GPA: 4.00

High School: The Hun School of Princeton

Heritage: Costa Rican and Chinese

Mei became curious about coding when she would watch her dad code for work as a child. She developed her interest into a passion in her first programming class her sophomore year, continuing onto AP Computer Science the following year. Mei currently serves as Co-Leader of her school's Girls Who Code Club. She wants to share her love of programming with others and is relentless about making computer science more available to girls in underrepresented communities. She has volunteered to be a Tech Buddy at her local library. This role gave her the opportunity to teach elementary school children technology and programming skills using interactive toys. Last year, Mei received Honorable Mention for the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT) Aspirations in Computing Award in recognition of the work she does to promote STEM in her community and her achievements in coding competitions. Mei consistently challenges herself. She has taken the most rigorous courses at her school and excelled in every one of them. She has a 4.0, is a scholar-athlete, and is captain of her school's rock climbing team. She is also a leader of her school's Latinx community and is the President and Co-Founder of its Latinx and Hispanic Culture Club. She started the club back in 2017 in an effort to bring cultural awareness and community engagement to her school. Among the plans Mei has and the numerous projects she has in mind, she wants to use her programming abilities to increase the quality of life of senior citizens by creating programs and devices that help safeguard the protect them from cyber predators and physical harm. For the latter, she intends on using the properties of magnetic levitation to design a hand accessory using nanoparticles in a magnetic suspension system with a calibrated lifting force that would eliminate the use of traditional walking aids. She wants to continue learning and creating by studying Computer Science, Economics, or Entrepreneurial Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Chicago, or Columbia University.

EMELY POZO-LIN

BRONZE

Major: Computer Science with a minor in Psychology

GPA: 3.80

High School: District of Columbia International School

Heritage: Salvadoran and Chinese

Emely has been able to explore her interest in technology and other STEM fields throughout her high school career, thanks to her relentless curiosity and desire to learn. She has continuously sought opportunities to participate in activities and programs that have allowed her to expand her knowledge base and exposed her to new technologies. The summer of 2019, Emely participated in a Girls Who Code internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers. It was here that she first learned various programming languages and became interested in pursuing a career in technology. Last summer, she took part in the Exelon STEM Leadership Academy held at the University of Maryland. Participants of the Leadership Academy were challenged with creating a product to mitigate the effects of climate change. Emely worked with a group to create an app to inform the public of the effects of fast fashion on climate change and provide avenues for its users to support environmentally conscious and sustainable fashion brands. Through the Leadership Academy, Emely also participated in panels with women leaders in STEM, learned about the energy industry, and further explored how technology can be used to help with issues of sustainability, renewable energy, energy conservation, and climate change. Dedicated to her community, Emely commits much of her free time to tutor elementary school students. She even found a way to continue tutoring and offering support through the setting of distance learning. Last summer, she organized a tutoring program for elementary and middle school students and dedicated a minimum of 17 hours every week to guide them academically and offer emotional support. With many of her students feeling isolated due to lockdown measures, she served as a friend and their connection to the outside world. Emely serves as a Student Representative on her school's Student Staff Advisory Committee. She is also a member of her school's varsity volleyball team. She plans on majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Psychology at Yale University, Georgetown University, or Johns Hopkins University.