



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

REL student named Gates scholarship honoree

A Robert E. Lee High School senior will receive full tuition to the college of his choice, extending to graduate and doctoral work, through a scholarship program funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Joel Mendez was announced recently as a 2012 Gates Millennium Scholar.

First of all, just being named a finalist for the scholarship is tough enough: there are more than 24,000 students that apply for it each year.

And for good reason: the scholarship gives a full ride through undergrad and graduate studies, and is only awarded to 1,000 students each year. It's given to students of African American, Native American, Asian American or Hispanic American heritage, who show a commitment to academics, leadership, and community service.

In addition to financial assistance, Gates Millennium Scholars receive academic support, mentoring and leadership training.

Nominees are evaluated on academic achievement, community service, and leadership potential.

The Gates scholarship is a life-changing event.

"Not only has it erased my financial limitations, but it has also opened countless opportunities. I'm no longer limited to a four-year bachelor's degree; I can now aim for a professional or doctoral degree, which will benefit me throughout the rest of my life," Joel said.

Joel is the middle son of Fermin and Leticia Mendez. His older brother, Juan, graduated from Lee two years ago, and his younger brother, Jose, is currently a sophomore at the district's IMPACT Early College High School.

Joel's well-roundedness is evidenced by his participation in multiple endeavors at Lee where he is a member of Mu Alpha Theta, Key Club, Interact Club, National Honor Society, yearbook, and French Club.

Gordon Blue, one of Joel's favorite teachers at Lee, said he is one of the top students I have ever taught.



Joel Mendez

"What makes Joel special, however, is his attitude; he is the first one to say hello to you with a smile, has only kind words to say, is never condescending when he makes the highest grade on a test and is never shy to ask questions," Mr. Blue said. "He has been a joy over these past two years, in three classes, and I am so proud of his accomplishments. He leaves some big shoes to fill here at Lee when he graduates."

Joel, 18, plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin, possible majoring in biomedical engineering.

He said the thought of researching and discovering cures to diseases such as Alzheimer's is one of his goals.

After earning his degrees at UT, Joel says he will probably aim for a Ph.D. degree, and then he will see. "At the same time, I will like to travel the world, maybe create an animated TV show, or run a business to compete with Microsoft. I'm not sure how that will work out; I still have a couple of years to plan," he said.

Earning Gates Scholar honors is a tremendous accomplishment, said Lee High School Principal Bruce Davis.

"I am extremely proud of Joel; he is a very hard worker and he always has a positive attitude. It is a pleasure to see him rewarded with this tremendous scholarship," Mr. Davis said.

Growing up, Joel attended Horace Mann Junior School and Ashbel Smith and Lorenzo De Zavala elementary schools.

Joel is currently ranked No. 2 in his graduating class at Lee.

Established in 1999 with the goal of developing the next generation of America's leaders, the Gates Millennium Scholars Program is funded by a \$1.6 billion grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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