



SIMON SCHOLARS

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CONTACT: Christine Welch, Echo Media Group
714-573-0899 x 225
christine@echomediapr.com

**FRON COUNTING PENNIES TO MEETING COLIN POWEL: “SIMON SCHOLARS” TEEN
BEATS THE ODDS BY BEING ACCEPTED TO GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY AND
ON TRACK TO BECOME THE FIRST HISPANIC U.S. PRESIDENT**

WASHINGTON D.C. (March 17, 2011) – Newport Beach based Simon Foundation for Education and Housing will be represented in Washington D.C. by four student beneficiaries of their Simon Scholars program; a unique high school and college scholarship that combines academics with life skills and leadership training.

From March 21 to 23, the four Simon Scholars will share their stories of adversity and accomplishment at The First Annual **BUILDING A GRAD NATION SUMMIT** co-hosted by America's Promise Alliance, the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic Enterprises, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. The summit commemorates the launch of America's Promise Alliance's 10-year Grad Nation campaign, which under the leadership of Founding Chairman, General Colin Powell, and Board Chair, Alma Powell, works to ensure that young Americans graduate from high school prepared for college, work and life.

Last June, the Simon Scholars program partnered with America's Promise Alliance to help fight our nation's high school dropout crisis. The Alliance partnership has allowed the Simon Scholars program to reach even more driven young students from adverse circumstances.

Philanthropist Ronald M. Simon founded the Simon Foundation for Education and Housing in 2003. He is Chairman of RSI Holding LLC, parent company of RSI Home Products, the largest cabinet manufacturing company in the United States. Simon believes every young person deserves the same chance to take advantage of the opportunities that this country has afforded him. "It is my mission to enable deserving students from difficult life and economic circumstances to achieve their own dreams of independence and self-sufficiency with the help of a 4-year college degree," he said.

The Simon Scholars program is a \$30,000, 6-year high school and college scholarship program for students that come from difficult life and economic circumstances. Beginning in their junior year of high

school Scholars receive scholastic assistance, leadership and life skills training, making them better prepared for college than students receiving purely financial scholarships. This includes a cashstipend, laptop computer, SAT / ACT prep courses, tutoring, college tours, leadership and teambuilding activities, community service work, mentoring and more. Support continues throughout a Scholar's 4-year college career.

Through 2011, the foundation has awarded over 500 scholarships valued in excess of \$16 million. "The program's 90.7% retention and 87% college graduation rates greatly exceed those of student's from similar profiles that do not receive the ongoing support Simon Scholars offers," says foundation CEO David R. Dukes.

"Our goal is to increase awareness of our program and to continue growing throughout the United States. We are thrilled to be partnered with America's Promise Alliance because our missions are one in the same - to keep kids in high school and college through graduation. It's crucial that we all do our part in helping students achieve their dreams through education and life skills," he continues.

The partnership has led to opportunities to demonstrate the effectiveness of their program on the national stage. Including an invitation for Simon Scholars to share their stories with dignitaries, government officials, state governors and leading educators at the upcoming summit.

Cynthia Valverde, a 6-year Simon Scholar from Santa Ana credits the program for helping her receive a college degree and setting her on the path to achieving her dream of becoming a doctor. "Being a Simon Scholar has taught me that you cannot let your past determine your future. It has made me even more determined to be better. Sometimes you really do need someone to tell you that you can make it," she says. Cindy is now a fourth year student at the University of California San Diego, intern and medical interpreter at Palomar Medical Center, and plans to attend medical school to study Pediatric Oncology. She will be telling her story of triumph over adversity before introducing U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

FellowSimon Scholars Forest Ogunyankin, Chelsea Johnson and Christian Jurado will accompany Ms. Valverde to the capitol city. Each of them had their own share of trials and tribulations.

Ogunyankin, a junior at Chamblee Charter High School in Atlanta, GA was diagnosed with the neurological disorder hydrocephalus and has undergone several major surgeries to correct the problem. Despite such adversity, he is an academic, an athlete, a musician, and multilingual. He will also be traveling to the country of Georgia this summer to help children in underserved communities - before completing high school and starting his journey to becoming a pediatric neurologist.

Chelsea Johnson is a senior at El Camino High School in Oceanside, CA who is determined to overcome her difficult life circumstances. Johnson is a 5.0 student who plays viola and classic guitar in between finding time for community service projects. She too aspires to study medicine and make a difference by helping others.

University of New Mexico sophomore Christian Jurado was raised in the South Valley side of Albuquerque and faced a situation riddled with crime, street gangs and drugs. He is pursuing a Bachelors in Business with a double major in Spanish, has interned multiple nonprofits and currently works with global Citigroup Corporation managing bilingual financing portfolios. Christian hopes to own a business law firm one day.

"All of the Scholars attending the Grad Nation Summit exemplify what being a Simon Scholar truly means. No matter how unfortunate their circumstances they all exude drive and determination to be successful. With the help of our program they have become role models to their classmates, friends and family members. They are our future leaders. I am humbled by each of their stories and proud of what they have and will achieve," concludes Mr. Simon.

The foundation is currently seeking participation from donors and volunteers.

ABOUT THE SIMON SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The Simon Scholars program is a multi-year scholarship program helping students facing difficult life and economic circumstances to excel academically and socially so they can successfully attend and complete college. The unique program includes an intensive college preparation curriculum that begins in high school. Simon Scholars are required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA by the end of their junior year. During high school students receive a cash stipend, laptop computer, social skill training, academic support, leadership training and community service activities. Scholars are also provided college-preparatory assistance through ACT and SAT courses, college tours and assistance in the application process from college coaches. Following the completion of high school, Simon Scholars receive a \$16,000 college scholarship. Since 2003, the foundation has awarded more than 500 scholarships, valued in excess of \$16 million. Currently there are Simon Scholar chapters operating in high schools in Georgia, New Mexico, California and a candidate program in Washington D.C.

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