

Scholarship in memory of UWO student helps education majors

by Hajra Ahmad - Wednesday, May 08, 2013

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/27251/scholarship-in-memory-of-uwo-student-helps-education-majors/>

When a rafting accident unexpectedly took Lina Vergara's life in July 2012, the family of the 20-year-old University of Wisconsin Oshkosh elementary education student decided to pay tribute to her by creating a scholarship in her memory.

The Lina Vergara Memorial Scholarship was established to assist students who share her teaching ambitions and her compassion for others, especially those at the University who are facing challenges in their academic ventures.

The first-time recipients of the Lina Vergara Memorial Scholarship, Cindybel Arias-Castañeda and Elizabeth Cooke, both aspire to become educators.

Arias-Castañeda, a 21-year-old junior, was inspired to become a teacher because she found it hard to learn English as a bilingual child from a Hispanic background and could not relate to her mostly Caucasian teachers.

"I felt like when I would get older I could be a role model to a lot of the minority students in our area," Arias-Castañeda said.

For Arias-Castañeda receiving this scholarship is also personal. She knew Lina Vergara since her freshman year and was close to her, both sharing the same major and minor.

"I have to do it for her," Arias-Castañeda said. "Because I know she would have been a good teacher."

She said she is grateful to receive the scholarship as it will help her financially and let her continue her friend's legacy, Arias-Castañeda said.

Eventually she wants to teach middle school students and hopes to become a principal after obtaining a master's degree in administrative work, Arias-Castañeda said.

Cooke, the second recipient of the Lina Vergara Memorial Scholarship, is a fifth-year senior at UW Oshkosh with a dual major in special education and early childhood. Cooke said she chose education because she loves to work with kids.

"I feel very blessed and honored," Cooke said about receiving the scholarship.

Cooke said she appreciates the Vergara family's willingness to help future educators finance their careers, working as many as three part-time jobs each semester to pay for her education.

"It is very helpful," Cooke said. "This money will allow me to focus more on my education and less on

my time put in to work to pay for my education.”

Alejandro Vergara said he decided to help education students like his daughter and keep her dreams alive as he kept learning about the positive impact she had on the campus community.

“Lina touched the hearts of so many people,” he said. “Her warm and caring heart never saw color, race, sex or economic status in anyone.”

At the time of her death Lina Vergara had posted the quote “don’t let the world change your smile, let your smile change the world” on her Facebook page, Alejandro Vergara said.

Her family has “decided to perpetuate this wonderful motto,” by arranging the Glowing Smiles 5K run/walk and Kids Fun Dash, Alejandro Vergara said. The fundraiser, which will benefit the scholarship fund, will be held Saturday, May 11 at Orchid Heights Park Shelter in Middleton, Wis.

For more information, visit www.glowingsmiles.org or www.linavergara.com

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh Foundation](#)