

## DPCF Awarded Four \$1,500 Scholarships for College Bound Students



Rosemary Argus executive director of the Foundation is pictured with the four 2019 winners; (left to right) Sophia Panfil from Elk Grove High school; Samantha Parcell from Maine West High School, Arline Vargas from Maine West High School and Jillian Valente from Elk Grove High School. They were chosen out of more than 38 applicants who applied in the 2018 school year from all the high schools with students living in Des Plaines. Aimee DeBat/Tim Panfil  
**Aimee DeBat**

The Des Plaines Community Foundation awarded four \$1,500 scholarships to 2019 Des Plaines college bound students. This is the seventh year the Foundation has offered scholarships.

According to Rosemary Argus, executive director of the Foundation, the annual scholarships are available for both two-year and four-year college students starting school in 2019. Our four awardees celebrated their achievements at the annual Education Scholarship luncheon held in late May.

The 2019 recipients for the Foundation scholarships this year were four young ladies, which was a first for the Foundation, she commented.

"We believe that helping our young adults obtain a college education is an investment, not only in the future of our youth, but also in the future of Des Plaines," said Argus. "The scholarships will help bring a college degree within reach for students who need it most."

The four 2019 winners were Sophia Panfil and Jillian Valente from Elk Grove High School and Samantha Parcell and Arline Vargas from Maine West High School. They were chosen out of more than 38 applicants who applied in the 2018 school year from all the high schools where Des Plaines residents attend.

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Here are the details about the four 2019 Foundation scholarship recipients:

- Sophia Panfil is attending Valparaiso University in Indiana and plans to major in Biology as well as attain a bachelor degree in biology with an additional field of study.

"I chose Valparaiso University because it offers career tracks, majors and minors in areas of interest, from a pre-med track to neuroscience or criminology, amongst others.

"With my potential career goals based in the sciences, my plan is to continue my education after earning my bachelor degree," said Panfil. Service to others and volunteerism has been a part of Panfil's life from a very young age. For the past year, she has volunteered at school, the Des Plaines Public Library with a summer reading program, her church, and even at her dance studio.

At Elk Grove High School she has been a peer tutor, a member of Best Buddie, worked at concession stands, ushered at performances and in Relay for Life. She has gone with school groups, church and even with just friends to help at Feed My Children.

She worked with other children and teens through-out Youth Ministries' programs to make blanket for sick children and put together care packages for the elderly, visited nursing homes, and put together food items at Thanksgiving for shelters, and bought and wrapped gifts for less fortunate children.

She has served as an usher and assisted teachers at her Sunday school and preschool. Most recently, she decided to be a teacher's assistant this academic year at her dance school for kindergarten aged class.

Each time she has helped others, she have been able to take away important lessons. She has learned how to interact with people of all ages, from young ballet dancers to senior citizens.

This includes improved communication and listening skills, which she will use no matter what she does in life. She treated all volunteer work as a job by being punctual, responsible a dependable, understanding that others rely on her when she has made that commitment to help.

Panfil learned how important volunteerism is in today's world. It has given her greater perspective and understanding of others as she takes her next steps.

Samantha Parcell is planning to attend Elmhurst College and will be studying Special Education and Studio Art. She graduated from Maine West High School this year.

"In my academic career, one of my most highlighted goals is to earn my bachelor and then a master's degree in Special Education and Art, while working with children in a school of need. I hope to save enough money to be able to live on campus at Elmhurst for a year while staying involved in the community. I grew up through organizations like United Parcel Service (UPS) for Down Syndrome, and with elementary schools in my neighborhood that I attended," said Parcell.

For the past four years and even before high school Parcell has been part of various community and school organizations that aim to serve others. As her senior year was beginning to wrap up she looked back upon her experiences to see just how they prepared her for her future.

UPS for Down Syndrome is a not-for-profit organization run by family members and volunteers who know someone with Down Syndrome and want to help better the lives of those around them, disability or not. She first got involved with the organization as a 7th grader.

Parcell was also president of Maine West high schools Key Club and a member since her freshman year. Key Club is a service organization that promotes inclusivity and team work through a variety of community events such as Kiwanis Peanut Day, Feed My Starving Children, Blanket of Dreams, Des Plaines Tree Lighting and the annual Special Education Basketball Tournament.

Key Club and other organizations like UPS for Down Syndrome, have prepared me for the future by showing me the importance of team work and being a leader.

Jillian Renee Valente plans to attend the University of Dayton in Ohio and pursue a degree in Chemistry. She recently graduated from Elk Grove High School.

"My goal after high school is to become a chemistry teacher," said Valente. "To prepare for my future, I am currently a peer tutor at high school and a senior leader in physical education class. My personal goal is to make a positive difference in the world. I believe a teacher has the power to make that difference. All children need nurturing and deserve

the chance to succeed no matter what their background may be. Becoming a teacher would not only change my life, but the life of each child I am privileged to teach. The reward is immeasurable.

Valente participated in community service in a number of ways during her high school years.

"It has been my privilege to coach Special Olympic athletes in the sport of gymnastics for the last four years. I helped instruct and train athletes with Down Syndrome, visual impairments, autism, learning disabilities and developmental delays," she said.

"In addition, our gym hosts several fundraisers throughout the year to raise funds for this most worthy cause, and I have volunteered at these events. An example of these fundraisers include our annual gymnastics meet, where athletes come from around the state to compete and our annual Circus of the Superstars event which is entertaining and always draws a crowd."

Valente's duties included planning the event, setting up equipment, assisting judges, collecting admissions, working concessions and coaching athletes.

She was also a volunteer peer tutor in math and science at Elk Grove High School during her lunch period for the last two years. She received the Tutor of the Quarter award last year for exceptional work with her fellow students. Her tutoring and coaching background has given her a glimpse of teaching and experiencing true compassion and patience for others. A good teacher can enrich and change the educational path of any child.

Valente said, she also gained experience as a Physical Education senior leader, tutoring in high school, coaching gymnastics and working with Special Olympic athletes.

"As a teacher, I know I would be impacting the lives of hundreds, possibly thousands of students that cross my path during my career," she said "And to think I could change so many lives is humbling yet more gratifying than words can say."

Arline Vargas recently graduated from Maine West High School and plan to attend Benedictine University in Lisle and study Psychology and Spanish. A daughter of two Mexican immigrants and living in the suburbs of Chicago, Vargas was exposed to vastly contrasting communities of Hispanics and American cultures. Even at a young age she was able to distinguish the difference in culture, language, mindset between her Mexican family and those of her American friends.

The biggest difference, however, was the evident struggle that her Mexican family and community had to battle: language barriers, lack of resources and the at the age of seven when she learned English her parents relied on her to carry on adult responsibilities such as ordering at restaurants, translating her father's prescriptions and occasionally, she was the one who would clear the misunderstandings between a Spanish speaking customer and an English speaking employee.

Having witnessed and experienced the struggles that burden the Hispanic community, it had sparked her incentive at a young age to be an active, empowering and resourceful person who helps others.

"I began to tackle this goal of mine by becoming a leader at Maine West High School and the City of Des Plaines," said Vargas.

She has volunteered alongside with the Des Plaines Park District's Friends of the Parks and Maine West's Spanish Club, where she led and organized and brought to life many of their events to serve for the community.

"As a leader in Spanish Club for the past four years, I have excelled in creating and leading volunteering projects and that would aid minority and low income families," she said.

These experiences, such as translating and filling out financial documents for Spanish speaking families, or serving meals to the homeless, have shaped Vargas to be a leader, as well enhanced her creativity, and broadened her communication skills.

With the help from this scholarship, it would facilitate her pursuit of a post-secondary education and essentially, it would bring her one step closer to becoming the communication liaison that is needed in my community.

The DPCF scholarship committee trustees are Rich Holke, Kimberly Potokar, Mark Lucaccioni, Chris Hassett, Chris Petersen, Sandra Hansen, Kathy Puetz, Margaret Polovchak, Sherry Gardner and Dick Sayad. They judged the student applications based on strict guidelines and required paperwork.

"Students are required to be Des Plaines residents, have a GPA of 3.0 or higher," said Mark Lucaccioni, vice president of the Foundation and helped the scholarship committee judge the nearly 40 applications.



"High school seniors must be in the process of applying to or enrolled in an accredited undergraduate program at college, university, or vocational/technical institution during the fall semester of 2019 to be eligible."

To qualify, students must be enrolled for a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester. Graduate programs do not qualify.

The students are required to provide a 100-word statement of their personal goals and a 500-word essay about how they have participated in community service or worked to support themselves or their family. A copy of high school transcripts which include a cumulative GPA is also required.

Students must complete a scholarship program application which can be downloaded at [www.desplainescommunityfoundation.org/scholarship](http://www.desplainescommunityfoundation.org/scholarship).

If any of the required paperwork is missing, the applicant's submission is automatically disqualified from the review process. Students should not send additional documentation than what is required. It will not be considered in the review process.

The foundation raises funds to identify, link and mobilize assets to support the service programs of the Des Plaines Healthy Community Partnership Programs whose activities improve the lives of those that live and work in Des Plaines.

Some of the programs include; Neighbors Helping Neighbors Program Committee; Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Program Committee; Intergenerational Program Committee, and Seasons of Service program Committee.

The foundation has no paid employees and is 100-percent volunteer. Foundation is a 501c3 organization and funds are obtained from individuals, businesses, and corporate tax-deductible contributions as well as from other foundations.

For more information go to the foundation website [www.desplainscommunityfoundation.org](http://www.desplainscommunityfoundation.org) or call Rosemary Argus at 847-525-5566.