

'... their help has truly blessed me'

AWC Foundation
celebrates scholars
and donors

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College tuition has since the '90s transformed into one of the most daunting expenses for families and students leaving high school.

According to The College Board, within the last decade both public two-year and four-year institutions increased tuition at the average rate of around 3 percent per year.

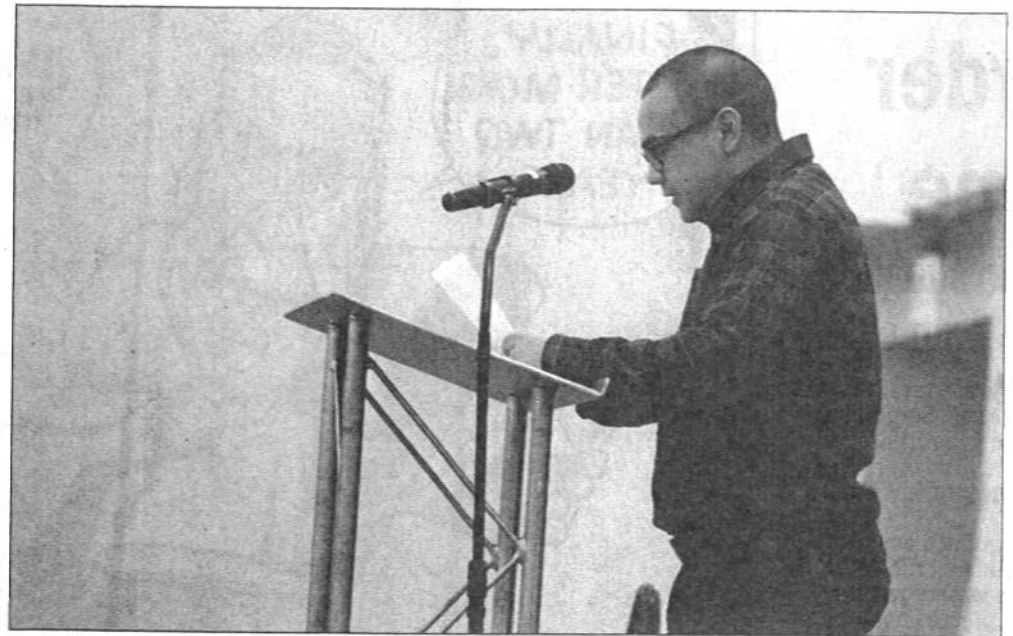
And for Yumans, even though Arizona Western College charges far less than many other schools, working a job while attending classes sometimes isn't enough.

That's where the Arizona Western College Foundation comes in.

A community organization whose mission statement is "to empower people to reach their educational and career aspirations by enhancing access to learning opportunities," the foundation offers dozens of scholarships to hundreds of students every year.

On Thursday, they held their annual Celebration of Scholars, where they recognized both donors and recipients, served dinner and listened to speeches from, in addition to AWC staff and administrators, students whose lives had been changed by the AWC Foundation.

Scholarships that are set up through the foundation are funded by donors from around the Yuma community and the country. Some have certain criteria that they would like to see in recipients, some ask applicants to



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ARMANDO PRECIADO TELLS HIS STORY on stage at AWC's 2019 Celebration of Scholars.

write an essay and others have no requirements at all.

The Courtney Sheldon Norman Memorial Scholarship, for example, covers tuition, room and board and is given to students with disabilities attending AWC who are pursuing a degree in information technology. It's dedicated to Norman, a resident of Yuma who, after a nearly fatal car accident that left him unable to walk, triumphed against adversity and completed his associate degree at AWC.

During Thursday's celebration, overcoming the odds was a theme that was woven into many of the speakers' stories.

David Gomez, one of the students giving testimonials that night and a recipient of multiple scholarships, said that they have allowed him to focus on school while working part time, and still have a little bit of extra money for expenses.

"When it comes down to the numbers, thousands of students don't pursue their career of choice," Gomez said in his speech. "Not from a lack of ability or drive, but from a lack of financial means.

Another scholarship recipient, Armando Preciado, also spoke, thanking the staff at AWC. He said that the foundation has helped him with his housing expenses, allowing him to succeed at school.

"Through the foundation's financial ser-

vices they were able to help with housing expenses, which without this it would be a struggle for me to gain employment, pay rent (and) study all at the same time," said Preciado. "It has been difficult for me to hold down a job here in Yuma while wanting to earn a degree.

"...without these (scholarships), it would have made life quite difficult. All of their help has truly blessed me. It has, for the time being, given me stabilization and some peace of mind. It has also given me hope that one day I could be an example to other friends and family."

In the last four years, over \$1 million has been invested into students by donors and the AWC Foundation. During the previous school year, 2017-2018, \$322,000 of scholarships were awarded.

"It's a big accomplishment, and it's not going to go away," said Renee Smith, who is in her fourth year heading up the AWC Foundation as their director of institutional advancement, during her closing remarks at Thursday's event. "The need isn't going away, in fact the need is growing.

"And so, again, I'm so grateful that you're (all) here. We're grateful for the trust that you've put in us as the staff and in the foundation and in the board of directors, and the trust that you've given to the college to do what we're doing in this community."

