

## Plugging the BRAIN DRAIN

### Scholarships keep bright students working in Coastal Bend

**AMANDA NELSON, Caller-Times**  
**Published: September 30, 2004**

For his 38th birthday, John Chapa got the gift of a life-time. The Texas A&M University-Kingsville sophomore was one of 10 students recognized Wednesday as scholarship recipients at a luncheon for the Mano-a-Mano Scholarship Empowerment Program.

"I'm raising two kids on my own, I've got a mortgage and I work full-time nights," Chapa said. "Without this scholarship I wouldn't be able to pursue any type of education beyond what I have."

Mano-a-Mano is a program that grants scholarships to high school and college students in the Coastal Bend. The program encourages students to pursue post-secondary education for technical careers and requires they work nearby after they graduate.



This year, the program funded 10 new scholarships and renewed six scholarships from previous years. The scholarships were \$1,500 a year for students attending two-year colleges and \$2,000 a year for students attending four-year colleges or universities.

Recipients must maintain a grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale, must be full-time students earning at least 12 credits a semester and must demonstrate employment in the local area after graduation. For students like Chapa, the opportunity to stay in a city he loves in exchange for a scholarship was an opportunity he couldn't refuse.

"I was born and raised (here); I really don't want to leave," he said. "I want to stay here so my kids can grow up and stay here."

It's that sentiment, and an aging workforce, that caused the Corpus Christi Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Flint Hills Resources to established Mano-a-Mano three years ago, said Joe Cisneros III, president and CEO of the chamber. Flint Hills has given \$160,000 for past, present and future student scholarships. The Coastal Bend Community Foundation helps the organizations administer the scholarships.

Cisneros said the scholarship program would continue to seek partnerships with other local businesses and industries so it could increase the number of scholarships.

"Sometimes it's hard to attract people to come and work in South Texas," said Dave Allen, plant manager for Flint Hills Resources.

Richard Tuttle, director of regional public affairs for Flint Hills, said that if people are in school, they're more likely to stay and work in Corpus Christi.

"It's difficult sometimes to find the right skill set when we have positions open," he said. "When we have a good pool of talent here, it makes it easier to find those skilled workers."

Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch, retired Army lieutenant colonel and Wednesday's keynote speaker, commended the efforts by the Hispanic chamber and companies such as Flint Hills for reaching out to the students in the community as future leaders.

"That's what separates them from a company that's just interested in the bottom line," she said. With tears in her eyes, Kickbusch encouraged the audience at Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz International Center to help students become the future leaders of the nation's workforce.

"We must encourage our youth to aspire to be those engineers," she said. "We need courageous leaders at every level of American society."

That's the message Chapa intends to pass on to his own two kids.

"When I was in high school, no one really pushed me to go to college. There wasn't anybody to push me or motivate me," he said. "I want to be able to show them the opportunities that are available to them."

Graphic: Mano-a-Mano Scholarship Recipients:

#### NEW RECIPIENTS

- \* Adolfo D. Aleman, Process Technology, Del Mar College, Robstown High School
- \* Javier Balli, Electrical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, San Diego High School
- \* Zulema Cervantes, Physics, Del Mar College, Miller High School
- \* John Chapa, Civil Engineering, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Moody High School
- \* CynthiaA. Cruz, Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Rockport-Fulton High School
- \* Doralee Q. Gonzalez, Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Roy Miller High School
- \* Jacob L. Hanson, Chemical Engineering, Del Mar College
- \* Stephanie L. Hogan, Accounting, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Gregory-Portland High School
- \* Chad J. McKinney, Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Calallen High School
- \* Deborah R. Perez, Accounting, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, H.M. King High School

#### RENEWED SCHOLARSHIPS

- \* Brian M. Cantu, Chemical Engineering, Del Mar College, Gregory-Portland High School
- \* Sabrina L. Delgado, Mechanical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Moody High School
- \* Jorge Garcia, Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Brownsville Homer High School
- \* John M. Guerra, Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Miller High School
- \* DianeT. Guerrero, Mechanical Engineering, Del Mar College, Tuloso-Midway High School
- \* Salvador E. Torres, Electrical Engineering, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Moody High School

Mug: John Chapa

Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch, a former lieutenant colonel in the Army, praised sponsors of scholarships for building local leaders at the Mano a Mano luncheon Wednesday at the Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz International Center. Photos by Mayra Beltran/Caller-Times

Copyright (c) 2004 Corpus Christi Caller-Times