

Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship 2016

Background

Good evening. My name is Paul Nelson and this is my daughter Whitney and we are here to acknowledge the recipients of the fourth annual Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship. It gives us great pleasure to introduce the male and female recipients who will receive a \$2500.00 college scholarship this fall in memory of Coach Nelson.

For those who are not familiar with Coach Nelson, she was a P.E. teacher and the head volleyball coach here at Ralston Valley from 2000-2013. She loved her position as an educator and a coach and she genuinely and deeply cared for her students, her athletes and her colleagues. Over the span of her career, she positively impacted so many people here at Ralston Valley. Tragically on March 3rd 2013, she passed away after a courageous battle with cervical cancer. She was 43.

To commemorate her life and to ensure that she continues to influence the lives of Ralston Valley students the Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship was established. The fund got its start when our family requested contributions in lieu of flowers at Lisa's services. Since it's inception the Ralston Valley students, faculty and staff in conjunction with the surrounding community and many generous sponsors have contributed to ensure the stability and longevity of the fund.

So many people have helped the fund grow by participating in annual fundraising events. I want to extend a special thank you to Mrs. Braketa and the members of Student Government who annually organize and run the "Lisa Nelson Mustang Stampede" a school sponsored 5K that directly benefits the scholarship fund. Thank you Stugo for all of your efforts! I also want to thank all of those students, parents, teachers and staff members who participated in last fall's 5K. There were over two hundred runners at the start line last October.

Together we have created a scholarship we can be proud of. Together we are fulfilling the mission of the scholarship board, which reads...**We want to remember and honor Lisa's legacy and Pay It Forward... through college scholarships for Ralston Valley High School Student Athletes.**

Selecting two recipients was not an easy task; as you can imagine there are some amazing student athletes in this building. Narrowing it down was very difficult due to the quality of the applications. Thank you to all of those that applied and to the teachers and staff that assisted them.

Both of tonight's recipients possess qualities respected by Coach Nelson. They are tremendous students, have experienced athletic achievement and have demonstrated leadership, good character, citizenship, sportsmanship and community involvement.

Gregg Castanuela

Our male recipient will be attending Colorado Mesa University this fall where he will be studying mechanical engineering. He is a National Honor Society member carrying a 3.9 GPA. During his junior and senior years he served as a member of Ralston Valley's Mustang Mentor program.

Athletically, he has participated in Baseball, Basketball, Football and Track. His junior season he was named 1st Team Academic All State and All Conference Honorable Mention in a season where he registered 37 tackles and 5 interceptions as a varsity defensive back. During the second game of his senior season, he sustained a broken leg that required surgery. As you can imagine, he was devastated that his senior season had been cut short. He stated that the experience was heartbreaking but it changed his life. He said, "I learned to not take anything for granted because in the blink of an eye, you can lose something you love dearly". What he learned as an athlete in his time at Ralston Valley is what really resonated with me. He wrote, "I built teamwork skills through insane activities at Mountain Camp for football, I built character through never quitting on my team, I learned perseverance from getting cut from the basketball team my senior year, I learned leadership and time management, but most importantly, I learned to love my family, friends and this amazing community.

He has been active in community service from a very young age. Between 5th and 8th grade as a student at Saint Anne's he donated time to the Meridian Retirement Center and assisted with projects such as Adopt a Street, quilt and blanket making, gathering toiletry supplies for shelters, and conducting various food drives. As an incoming freshman he volunteered for little league football and basketball camps and fell in love with volunteering. As a junior and a member of NHS he assisted with Trick-or-Treat Street. He has also been active outside of school volunteering as a tutor, assisting with summer athletic camps and a little league baseball team. During his senior year he compiled 120 hours of community service as an Outdoor Lab Leader for Sierra Elementary School at Windy Peak.

I am proud to introduce Gregg Castanuela as the male recipient of the Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship.

Bilkisu Grimes

Our female recipient will be attending the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs in the fall. She is a National Honor Society member carrying a 4.05 GPA. During her junior and senior years she served as a member of Ralston Valley's Mustang Mentor program. Her counselor says she is amazing with freshman students. She wrote, "I have seen her make connections with freshman that are beyond superficial and "how are you?" ; connections that are personal and relatable.

Athletically, during her time at Ralston Valley, she participated in soccer, basketball and track. In her essay to the scholarship board she says that of all the lessons she has learned as a student athlete *teamwork* has been the most vital lesson. She stated "Working in a team teaches you to be open to give and to receive, to share with others the best we can give and to accept from others new knowledge and ideas that could help us to continue growing as not only an athlete but a high-functioning member of society as well". She went on to state "growing as a person means to become a better version of yourself throughout the years, and being a student athlete has done that for me".

She has been active in the community since the age of twelve volunteering at her church The Sanctuary Downtown by watching kids while their parents attend sermons. She has also donated time to the Denver Rescue Mission preparing food for the homeless and has tutored sixth grade students in reading at Meiklejohn Elementary School. In addition, she has traveled to Mexico in 2013 and 2014 on mission trips to care for orphans at Casa Hogar.

Her counselor describes her as humble, someone with a strong work ethic, diverse and who gives back to the community.

I am proud to introduce Kiki Grimes as the female recipient of the Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship.