

CELEBRATING 36 YEARS OF VOLUNTEERISM

— THE 2026 —

SEQUOIA

AWARDS



MARCH 19, 2026 | REDWOOD CITY, CALIFORNIA

The Friends of Pete



In memory of Pete Uccelli – one of the founding members of the Sequoia Awards – we have established a way for individuals to become involved in supporting The Sequoia Awards scholarship program.

Pete Uccelli was a man who loved watching things grow. He planted trees. He built a business. He supported charities. He was generous to those who needed financial help, and he never accepted repayment but rather advised the recipients to pay it forward and assist others in their community.

Finally, he believed the future of tomorrow are the young people of today. Those values combined and resulted in the creation of The Sequoia Awards.

On behalf of The Sequoia Awards, the board invites you to join us and support the organization which Pete helped create by becoming a “Friend of Pete” and donating to The Sequoia Awards. Your tax-deductible donation to The Sequoia Awards will contribute to future scholarships for other deserving students.

How to Make a Tax-Deductible Donation in any amount to the Sequoia Awards and become a Friend of Pete:

To contribute this evening by cash, check, credit card, or pledge, please see one of our volunteers in the atrium.

To contribute by check, please make your check payable to the Sequoia Awards, write “Friends of Pete” in the memo area, and mail to:

**Sequoia Awards
P.O. Box 2355
Redwood City, CA 94064**

To contribute online, please go to sequoiaawards.org/donate and select the donate button or scan the QR code below.





WELCOME

Jeri Daines
Chair, Sequoia Awards

**OPENING
REMARKS**

Steve Mincey & Marcella Padilla
Board Members, Sequoia Awards

INVOCATION

Mackenzie Smailey
2026 Scholarship Recipient

**AWARD
PRESENTATIONS**

Outstanding Business of the Year
DeHoff Key Market
Presented by:
Mark Simon, Board Member, Sequoia Awards

Outstanding Individual of the Year
Franklin Herrera
Presented by:
Dennis McBride, Treasurer, Sequoia Awards

Student Scholarship Awards

Outstanding Students of the Year
**Daniela Cuadros and
Maria Fernanda Mellado Pena**
Presented by:
Jeri Daines, Chair, Sequoia Awards
Jenny Stahler, Past Chair, Sequoia Awards

**CLOSING
REMARKS**

Andy Frisch
Vice Chair, Sequoia Awards



About The Sequoia Awards

A small group of civic leaders led by Pete and Paula Uccelli established The Sequoia Awards in 1990 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring volunteerism in Redwood City. The first Sequoia Awards scholarship was for \$500. Since then, The Sequoia Awards has grown to become the largest scholarship program in Redwood City. To date, we have distributed more than \$3.9 million in scholarships thanks to the work of our board of directors and support from local businesses, other nonprofits, and individuals in our community who understand the importance of an active and engaged citizenry. Our scholarships are based solely on the volunteerism of our honorees. Academics, school-mandated volunteerism, and participation in school-sponsored activities and athletics are not part of the criteria.

Our Goals

Our mission is to inspire and recognize volunteerism in Redwood City. We do that by identifying and honoring our local high school seniors, businesses, and individuals who have had the greatest positive impact on our community through their volunteerism. True to our mission, an all-volunteer board of directors runs our organization. **We have no paid staff.**

2025 - 2026 Board of Directors

Jeri Daines, Chair
Andy Frisch, Vice Chair
Deanna Dooley, Secretary
Dennis McBride, Treasurer
Jenny Stahler, Past Chair

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March 19, 2026

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to the 36th annual Sequoia Awards. Tonight, we proudly continue a tradition that began more than three decades ago, when six visionary businessmen came together with a simple but powerful idea: to recognize students, individuals, and businesses in Redwood City who give back to our community through service. From the beginning, the Sequoia Awards have been grounded in the belief that volunteerism is the cornerstone of a healthy, thriving community, and that belief continues to guide us today.

It is truly an honor to serve as Chair of the Board this year. My many years and many roles on the board have been so inspiring, especially the privilege of witnessing, year after year, the extraordinary impact that service-minded individuals have on our community. Alongside our dedicated board members, I am grateful to help raise-up and celebrate those whose generosity of time and spirit make Redwood City stronger.

This year, we are proud to award 26 scholarships totaling \$192,500, with scholarships ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000. These scholarships are made possible by the incredible generosity of our donors and supporters, and they represent an investment not only in education, but in the future of our community.

Our student recipients are thoughtful, driven, and deeply committed to service. Among them, we are honored to recognize two Outstanding Students, Daniela Cuadros and Maria Fernanda Mellado Pena. Both are exceptional young leaders whose dedication, compassion, and volunteer spirit give us great hope for the years ahead.

We are also proud to honor DeHoff Key Market as our Outstanding Business. A longtime staple of our community, DeHoff Key Market exemplifies what it means to give back consistency, care, and a genuine commitment to Redwood City.

Finally, our Outstanding Individual, Franklin Herrera, is a pillar of our youth community. His selfless dedication and lasting impact on young people have inspired countless lives and set a powerful example for us all.

Tonight's honorees reflect the very best of Redwood City; its generosity, resilience, and sense of responsibility to one another. Thank you for being part of this special evening, for supporting the Sequoia Awards, and for helping ensure that the spirit of volunteerism continues to thrive for generations to come.

With gratitude,



Jeri Daines,
2026 Chair, Sequoia Awards





\$5,000 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



ALLISON YOUNG

Carlmont High School

Sponsor: Redwood Park Advisors and Tara Fowler Saccuman & Bob Haeusslein, Merrill, a Bank of America Company

Volunteering has been an important part of Allison's life since she was seven years old. Through volunteering, she has learned how to connect with her community, understand her place in the world, and step outside her comfort zone. Living in the diverse Peninsula has allowed her to meet people from different backgrounds and to volunteer at fundraisers for veterans and community leaders. Volunteering also helps Allison measure her personal growth by giving her opportunities to teach skills she has learned and improve her abilities. It also allows her to reconnect with friends and build new relationships, creating a strong social network that she says feels like a second family. Overall, Allison sees volunteering as essential to who she is, helping her contribute to society, grow as a person, and stay connected with inspiring people in her community.

Career Goal: Business Development

Quote: "Essentially, volunteering allows me to be part of a bigger community, constantly test myself as I grow, and expand my network with people who inspire me to be better each day."



ANGEL VIVEROS

Summit Preparatory Charter High School

Sponsor: Tony & Ali Uccelli and

Marilyn Territo, in honor of Pete & Paula Uccelli

Raised by a single mother, Angel feels determined to carry on the responsibility of working hard and to not let his mother down. Before his father left the family, he taught Angel to work hard, and to help others. When Angel joined the Sheriff's Activities League, he realized it would help him grow and to open new doors. There, he also joined the group Redwood City Together, where he participated in food distribution to needy families. Angel is determined to succeed in school so that he can not only support himself, but his family as well.

Career Goal: Electrical Engineer

Quote: *"Through Volunteering, I've learned helping others is one of the most powerful ways to make a difference."*



ANIKA KESHAVAN
Sequoia High School
Sponsor: Bill Block Foundation

While volunteering as a Counselor in Training at Camp Krem, Anika learned that effective leadership often comes through patience and leading by example, as illustrated when she encouraged a camper to eat by modeling the behavior herself. This experience showed Anika how small actions can build trust and create meaningful impact to others. Inspired by this lesson, she later co-founded a Business Professionals of America chapter and organized financial literacy workshops for 40 Central Middle School students, teaching budgeting and basic money skills. Anika also volunteered as a tutor with Project READ at the Redwood City Library, learning to adapt communication styles and connect with students from different backgrounds. Overall, these experiences taught her that service means sharing knowledge, building connections, and using small actions to strengthen the community.

Career Goal: Non-profit financial analyst

Quote: *"By volunteering, I've expanded my awareness of the issues facing the community around me and how I can help solve them, one small step at a time."*



ARIANNA PALAFOX
Sequoia High School
Sponsor: Bill Block Foundation and BKF Engineers

Arianna's first volunteer experience was with the Boys and Girls Club Future Grads program. There she helped with their summer academy assisting with logistics and navigating students. In high school, she became involved with the Latino Student Union, where she has found a way to connect with her culture and heritage. Whether it was helping with events like cultural showcases, fundraising, or hosting meetings, she has learned the value of teamwork, collaboration, and communication. She feels that by promoting her culture, the Latino Student Union was able to break through barriers and develop a sense of togetherness.

Career Goal: Contract Manager

Quote: *"Volunteering mostly through Latino Student Union has made me grow to be more compassionate and connected to others who have the same roots as I do."*



ASHLEY VELASQUEZ

Sequoia High School

Sponsor: Bill Block Foundation

Growing up in El Salvador, Ashley had a modest life, and her family struggled with basic expenses, including orthodonture, something most of us take for granted in the United States. When issues with her teeth became a health issue, she and her family struggled to find a dental clinic that could help her. Ashley arrived in the United States to start high school, and the positive experience she had with dentists and orthodontists has driven her to want to become an orthodontist herself. Ashley's experience in the United States was greatly improved when a school counselor suggested she join the DREAM Club. There she connected with other students and found purpose in the club's activities. Finding the courage to perform on stage for a fundraiser has given her confidence that she carries with her in life.

Career Goal: Orthodontist

Quote: *"It is easy for people to think that they can't make a big enough effort to make a big difference, but that even small efforts, consistent efforts will have a big impact, both on an individual level and on the greater society."*



DIANA CAAMAL

Sacred Heart Preparatory

Sponsor: The Billie Werby Memorial Scholarship

funded by Lori & Dennis McBride and the Werby Family

Diana began volunteering at the Siena Youth Center at age eleven, and she describes it as a transformative experience that shaped her commitment to her community. Through leadership roles, including becoming a department-lead responsible for planning lessons and managing students, Diana learned responsibility and the importance of showing up consistently for others. By supporting primarily Latino students with academics and enrichment activities, the Youth Center helps fill educational gaps and provide encouragement to struggling youth. Ultimately, volunteering has inspired Diana's future goals and given her a meaningful way to give back to the community that helped raise her.

Career Goal: Child Studies/Development, Psychology, or Public Health

Quote: *"Ultimately, volunteering means two simple things to me: It has shown me a future path I want to explore in college and beyond, and it has been incredibly fulfilling to give back the service I once received."*



DIANA MAGANDA

Sequoia High School

Sponsor: Alice W. Coghlan R.N. Scholarship funded by Steve & Diane Howard and Liza Bizzarro

After immigrating to the United States at age nine, Diana initially struggled not only to navigate a new language and school system, but also the resources and opportunities available to her. During freshman year at Sequoia High, Diana joined the Dream Club, which helped her discover the importance of volunteering, advocacy, and community support for undocumented and mixed-status students. Through the club, Diana helped organize community events (with Casa Circulo Cultural), fundraise for scholarships, lead meetings, and co-present workshops on topics such as “Know Your Rights” and emotional well-being in both English and Spanish. Her volunteer work also included helping at cultural events, assisting immigrants with technology at the North Fair Oaks Library, and facilitating community discussions. These experiences developed Diana’s leadership, communication, and organizational skills, eventually leading her to become co-President of the Dream Club. Overall, volunteering gave her a sense of purpose and strengthened Diana’s commitment to supporting and uplifting the Latino community.

Career Goal: Nurse

Quote: *“Volunteering is about being helpful in my community and making good use of my time and energy to help my community, without expecting anything in return.”*



ELIZABETH MADDEN

Sequoia High School

Sponsor: Bill Block Foundation and Kaiser Permanente

Growing up helping her mother, a first-grade teacher at Redeemer Lutheran, Elizabeth developed an early appreciation for service through small but meaningful acts in the classroom. Service continued through church activities, fundraising for a well in Nalwire, Uganda, and later sewing and collecting 300 masks for the same village during COVID. In high school, she connected service with her passions by volunteering with the Bay Area Women’s Sports Initiative, mentoring girls in sports, and organizing a uniform donation project for children in need through the Sequoia High School soccer program. Across these experiences, Elizabeth learned that leadership is rooted in empathy, initiative, and consistency. Volunteering has become central to her identity and inspired her desire to pursue a future in pediatric health care while continuing to serve others.

Career Goal: Pediatric Oncologist

Quote: *“As I look ahead, I hope to continue serving others with the same spirit of care that has guided me since those early days in my mom’s classroom, especially as I look forward to a possible career in pediatric health care.”*



EMILY PARKER

Woodside High School

Sponsor: Hannig Environmental Research Organization

Emily has found a way to combine volunteerism with her passion in life, environmentalism. Her journey began as a Leader in Training with the Redwood City Parks and Recreation, working with young campers. Emily then became a Counselor in Training at Scouting America's Camp Oljato. There her role developed into merit badge sessions, trail work, and camp maintenance. Emily participated in Scouting Eagle Projects, where she worked on trails, schools, and parks, but also placed American flags on veteran's graves, giving her a sense of gratitude. Whether she was helping children to complete a merit badge, or comforting a homesick camper, Emily thrived as a counselor. She then volunteered with the San Mateo Youth Climate Ambassador, which broadened her knowledge of environmentalism. The Octagon Club at her high school connected her with other volunteer opportunities, including Halloween events for local families, picking up trash, and assisting at the Kings Mountain Art Fair's Kiddie Hollow. Further, Emily volunteered with Woodside High School's Green Academy, where she ran a school-wide recycling and restoration project.

Career Goal:
Environmental Scientist

Quote: *"Most importantly, I learned that I serve not to be recognized, but because it strengthens who I am."*



GABRIELLA CHANDLER

Woodside High School

Sponsor: Stanford University and Stanford Health Care

The theater has given Gabriella both a boost in self-confidence and it has provided her a way to give back to her community. When starting high school, Gabriella joined the Octagon Club, and then started volunteering at the San Carlos Children's Theater. After finding success as an actor, she was asked to help put on performances with the Broadway Rising Stars. Gabriella dedicated many Sundays helping to instruct 5-7 year olds, as a classroom aid. In this role she learned patience, leadership, and gained confidence. Gabriella went on to volunteer every Labor Day at Kiddie Hollow, working with children at a glitter art table.

Career Goal: Occupational Therapy

Quote: *"Volunteering has allowed me to help others, especially the younger generations, and I can only hope that in a world full of technology and new advancements that were not popular when I was growing up, I can give them memories that I was able to make when I was their age."*



GRACE MANUEL

Woodside High School

**Sponsor: Sares Regis Education Community Foundation
and W.L Butler Construction**

Grace has been volunteering since she was a baby, because her parents were very active in volunteering in the community, including the Salvation Army, Rotary, and Girl Scouts. While she was still in middle school, Grace and her mom joined the National Charity League. But when it came time for Grace to choose her own volunteering opportunities, she found a robotics club in East Palo Alto. Grace was intrigued, despite her lack of knowledge of robotics, and wanted to help this financially disadvantaged team. With experience, and with robotics research she has done on her own, she has steadily progressed to a position of a referee for robotics competitions. For the past four years, Grace has also volunteered at the Second Harvest Food Bank, preparing and distributing food to families in need. On top of that, Grace has worked in the kitchen and served as a waitstaff for Ada's Cafe, which provides employment and fosters independence for adults with developmental disabilities.

Career Goal:

Aerospace or Electrical Engineer

Quote: *"Volunteering has shaped who I am and who I want to be; someone who helps create opportunities for others to thrive, which I hope to do throughout my life."*



LUNA CHAVEZ

Woodside High School

Sponsor: The Mark Zuckerberg & Priscilla Chan Scholarship

Luna's volunteer experience was as a youth counselor at STAR Camp, a program organized by the Sheriff's Activities League for low income youth. Luna thrived in her role as a counselor, planning daily activities, helping manage schedules, and supporting her fellow counselors. Her experience taught her how to communicate clearly, manage time effectively, and to exhibit patience. Luna became a role model for some of the young female campers, and she enjoyed the feeling of giving back to her community.

Career Goal: Management and Marketing

Quote: *"I want to keep creating a space where every child feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their potential."*



MACKENZIE SMAILEY

Sequoia High School

**Sponsor: Bill Block Foundation and
Redwood City Police Officers Association**

Mackenzie's path toward volunteerism began at church, where at a young age she volunteered to watch and take care of children instead of socializing with her peers. She later joined the Girl Scouts, earning the Bronze Award for a community project where she and her troop made blankets for animal shelters. In high school, she joined Miracle League, a baseball league for individuals with severe special needs, even recruiting her father to join so she could help out with adults with needs. Mackenzie's discipline and desire to help her community also lead her to join the Police Cadet Explorer Program, ascending to a Squad Leader mentoring new cadets. With the Explorer Program, she has helped to lead several academies while volunteering at parades and events, supporting crowd safety, and handing out food to the homeless. Her volunteerism continued when she joined Health Occupation Students of America, where she led emergency response drills, blood drives, and other health career events.

Career Goal: Diplomat

Quote: *"Through years of service in my community, I've discovered the true meaning of patience, compassion, leadership, and purpose."*



MEGAN BENCE

Carlmont High School

Sponsor: The Crittenden Family and Mark Simon

Megan volunteers to share her passions for music, tennis, and nature with younger students, inspired by the supportive teachers and coaches she had growing up. Through the Carlmont Music Mentors program, she also helps elementary and middle school students learn flute skills and prepare for auditions, especially supporting those whose music education was disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also helped welcome new students to the high school music program through leadership roles in orientation events. Megan expanded her service to tennis by volunteering as an assistant coach for a middle school team after their coach retired. She designed practices, organized matches, and emphasized teamwork and sportsmanship. Later, she helped grow the program by recruiting and training high school volunteers to coach at two middle schools. In addition, Megan served as a cabin leader at San Mateo County Outdoor Education, guiding fifth graders in learning about ecology and sustainability while developing leadership skills working with large groups of younger students. Through volunteering, Megan discovered her ability to lead, mentor, and positively influence others. These experiences deepened her appreciation for teaching and coaching and strengthened her passion for music, which she hopes to pursue as a music major while continuing to volunteer in the future.

Career Goal: Professional Musician

Quote: *"Not only has helping others taught me leadership skills, but it has also helped me better understand myself and what I want to do in the future."*



PEARL "DESIRE" CORTEZ-ESTRADA

Crystal Springs Uplands School

**Sponsor: Recology San Mateo County and
Welch-Everett Family Trust**

Volunteering with the Sheriff's Activities League began as a way for Desire to get involved in her community, but grew into a six-year experience that shaped her identity. Through mentoring youth and working alongside law enforcement, Desire learned that leadership is often about patience, empathy, and leading by example rather than being in charge. Desire's experience taught her the importance of communication, understanding different perspectives, and building trust within a community. Despite challenges, she discovered that consistent effort and showing up for others can create meaningful impact. Ultimately, Desire's time with SAL inspired a lasting passion for community service, youth mentorship, and living with empathy and purpose.

Career Goal: Lawyer, psychologist

Quote: "I've learned that service isn't just something you do; it's a way of living with empathy, awareness, and purpose."



SANTIAGO SANDOVAL

Menlo School

**Sponsor: Monterra Credit Union and
Black Mountain Properties**

Through volunteering in food distribution, tutoring, and cultural leadership, Santiago learned important lessons about empathy, responsibility, and community. Working with Second Harvest Food Bank during the pandemic revealed the realities of local food insecurity and the importance of providing an element of dignity in times of need. Tutoring and teaching roles with the Peninsula Bridge Summer Academy helped Santiago to understand the value of patience and trust, while empowering students to build confidence in their abilities. As a leader in Latinos Unidos and through involvement with the Student Diversity Leadership Conference and ALAS (an organization serving farmworker families in Half Moon Bay), Santiago worked to foster cultural belonging and support underserved communities. Overall, these experiences taught him that service is not just about individual acts, but about developing a lifelong commitment to supporting and strengthening communities.

Career Goal: Financial Advisor

Quote: "I have learned that service is not rooted in individual actions, but through cultivating a lifelong mindset of responsibility and care."



\$7,500 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



ABRAHAM SUAREZ

Summit Preparatory Charter High School

Sponsor: Oracle USA Inc. and Heritage Bank of Commerce

Abraham grew up in a deteriorating low-income apartment in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, where poor housing conditions affected many families, including his own. This experience motivated him to help his community and led him to intern with Rebuilding Together Peninsula, a non-profit that repairs homes for low-income residents. During the internship, Abraham learned organizational and practical skills, helped build furniture for schools, sorted applications, and supported volunteer operations. Inspired by this experience, he organized a school beautification project, coordinating volunteers to build furniture, improve the school garden, landscape the yard, and paint a large mural of the school mascot. The mural has become a lasting symbol of collective community effort. Abraham also volunteered internationally through Global Glimpse, traveling to Chitré, Panama to help build a greenhouse for a low-income school that relied on agriculture to feed its students. Working closely with the local community broadened his perspective on global needs and the resilience of people facing difficult circumstances. Through these experiences, Abraham feels that volunteering gave him confidence, purpose, and a stronger connection to others. He believes service helps build stronger communities and creates a cycle of support that empowers future generations.

Career Goal: Accountant

Quote: *"Volunteering isn't just for yourself; volunteering, to me, is to plan for the future."*



ANICA GAGGAR

Woodside High School

Sponsor: Dignity Health Sequoia Hospital and
The Gloria Kennett Memorial Scholarship

Volunteering and mentoring others helped Anica discover a sense of purpose. In one of her early volunteer roles, she served as a junior director for a children's production of The Music Man, where she struggled to manage young students but ultimately felt proud when they performed and found joy in theater. Her understanding of service deepened through coaching an 8-and-under travel softball team. After struggling with anxiety and negative coaching on her own varsity team, she quit the team but continued playing and chose to coach younger players. Supporting a young pitcher who shared her anxiety helped her become the kind of encouraging coach she wished she had. She also volunteered with newly immigrated adults practicing English and interned with Stanford working with families affected by childhood cancer. Through these experiences, she connected with people from different backgrounds and offered support during challenging moments. Looking back, Anica sees these experiences as pieces of a puzzle that reveal her passion for helping others, building empathy, and forming meaningful connections. Although she doesn't yet know her exact future path, she knows it will involve service and learning from the people she helps.

Career Goal: Pediatric Oncology

Quote: *"When I look at all these pieces in front of me, I see the joy I get from helping people, learning about them, and being a part of their lives."*



CHRIS VELASCO

Woodside High School

Sponsor: Hannig Sail It Forward Foundation

Volunteering through the Boys and Girls Club has helped Chris grow as a leader while allowing him to have a meaningful impact on his community. He helped organize and lead events such as community health fairs, where families learned about important health resources. Through these experiences, he developed skills in teamwork, organization, and leadership, and realized that volunteering is about creating real impact rather than simply feeling good about helping. As president of the Keystone Club, Chris took on greater responsibilities, including organizing events, creating decorations for the club's Thanksgiving dinner, and serving as the emcee for major events like Youth of the Year. These roles helped him build confidence in public speaking and adapt his communication to different audiences. He also applied these leadership skills by recruiting students to the Middle College program and helping organize the Orgullo y Educación (OYE) Latino conference. One of his most meaningful experiences was tutoring a third-grade student named Melvin through Healthy Cities Tutoring. By using both Spanish and English, Chris helped Melvin improve his reading and writing skills and grow more confident in English. This one-on-one experience showed Chris that the true value of volunteering lies in the growth it inspires in others. Overall, volunteering transformed Chris's high school experience, strengthening his leadership, communication, and commitment to serving his community—especially the Latino community. These experiences have inspired him to pursue a future career in law, education, or business where he can continue making a positive impact.

Career Goal:

Immigration Lawyer

Quote: "I know that I want to choose a career that can have some impact in my community, a value that I gained from community service."



JOHNNY WEST

Design Tech High School

Sponsor: The Will Richardson Memorial Scholarship

Johnny believes that volunteering is a way for him to express gratitude and support others, shaped by his personal experience with Tourette Syndrome. Growing up, his tics led to misunderstandings and bullying, which motivated him to educate classmates through presentations, puppet shows, and interviews to raise awareness about Tourette's. After receiving specialized therapy that helped him manage his condition, he felt grateful and wanted to give back. In high school, he joined the Young Men's Service League (YMSL) where he served meals to and connected with the elderly. He also began volunteering with the National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy (NCEFT), where he helped maintain the grounds so therapy sessions could run smoothly. Inspired by their mission to help people with disabilities, he also chose to support the organization through his Eagle Scout project. Johnny also volunteers in other areas he cares about, such as teaching kids about tide pools and ocean life at the Marine Science Institute. This was a perfect way for him to pass on important information about caring for the earth to a younger population. Another volunteer experience for Johnny was at the Habibi Center, a refugee facility in Greece, where he helped a refugee teenager learn English. Through these experiences, he learned that volunteering often means building genuine human connections. Overall, Johnny sees volunteering as an extension of his personal journey—using the empathy he developed through his challenges to help others, to give back for the support he received, and create meaningful connections with people.

Career Goal:

Public Affairs / Government

Quote: "If we all let our actions come not from what we have to do, but from a deep, personal gratitude for the good things in our lives, wouldn't the world be a much better place?"



MAILYN GOPAR

Sequoia High School

Sponsor: Pete & Paula Uccelli Foundation

Mailyn has always had a desire to help others, recalling a childhood memory of wanting to give money to a woman who was begging for money at a mall. As she grew older, Mailyn became more focused on herself until meeting a mentor, Tito, whose kindness and selflessness inspired her to reconnect with helping others. Tito introduced Mailyn to the VOICE program, where she learned to speak up about community issues, help homeless individuals by distributing food and resources, and organize a showcase to present her work to community leaders, including the mayor. Motivated by this experience, Mailyn joined Redwood City Together as a Youth Promoter, where she further supported her community by sharing information about local resources, events, food drives, and medical kits. Mailyn also helped inform community members, especially during concerns about illegal immigration enforcement, about their rights and available resources. Through these experiences, Mailyn realized the importance of volunteering and the positive impact she can have on her community and her own family.

Career Goal: Nursing

Quote: *"Having the opportunity to be a part of both of these wonderful programs has opened my eyes to what volunteering really is and how important it is."*



MAVERICK YEE

Woodside High School

**Sponsor: Lyngso Garden Materials Inc. and
Richard Franceschini & Robyn Franceschini Budelli**

Maverick believes that volunteering is more than donating time, it is a way he has discovered the person he wants to become and what impact he can have on others. Through experiences such as distributing meals, coaching athletes, and helping students, he has developed important qualities like patience, humility, and empathy. Volunteering taught Maverick that real progress takes time and persistence, helping him to appreciate small improvements and to remain patient when results are slow. It also strengthened his humility by reminding him that everyone has unseen struggles and that meaningful service often happens quietly without recognition. By interacting with diverse people, he has built empathy and learned that true leadership means supporting and uplifting others. He also realized the importance of community, seeing how small individual actions can combine to create meaningful change. Simple moments, like a smile, laugh, or thank-you, reinforce the impact of service. Ultimately, Maverick believes volunteering showed him a roadmap to how he wants to live his life, prioritizing helping others, building connections, and finding fulfillment through positive influence rather than personal achievement.

Career Goal: Economics

Quote: *"The value of volunteering lies not just in the actions themselves, but in the understanding, empathy, and personal growth that emerge from serving others."*



SAMANTHA VASQUEZ
Sequoia High School
Sponsor: Bill Block Foundation

For Samantha, volunteering has played a major role in shaping her leadership, character, and life goals. Through years of service, she has developed skills such as organization, responsibility, empathy, patience, and leadership. Much of her inspiration comes from the Boys and Girls Club, where she has participated since kindergarten and now serves as a senior leader in the Keystone leadership program. Through Keystone, she has organized community projects such as cleanups, mural initiatives, food drives, and events for younger members. She also had the opportunity to attend a national youth conference in Chicago, where she connected with other student leaders from across the country. In addition, she works as a teen staff member at a teen center and became a Youth of the Year finalist, sharing her leadership journey. Samantha hopes to continue serving her community and plans to pursue studies in public policy, political science, and pre-law so she can eventually work in government leadership. Overall, she sees volunteering as her lifelong passion and a way to promote equality, support people in need, and make a lasting difference in her community.

Career Goal: Politics / Public Service

Quote: *"I believe that all my work and dedication has made a difference in my community and I have learned so many new skills along the way that revealed the vast amount of capability I have."*

\$10,000 SCHOLARSHIP WINNER



JOSE JUAREZ MARTINEZ
Woodside High School / Middle College
Sponsor: Hannig Law, LLP

While volunteering with iLevantar!, a nonprofit supporting youth in North Fair Oaks, Jose connected deeply to his own childhood experiences receiving community support. As a student who once struggled with learning English, he wanted to give back by tutoring middle school students who face similar challenges. Through weekly sessions, Jose helped a seventh grader named Justin build confidence in reading aloud by sharing strategies that helped him overcome similar fears. Over time, Justin grew more confident and proud of his progress. Jose also began working with another student, Jairo, who spoke very little English. By using both Spanish and English and practicing patience, Jose helped him gradually improve by recognizing that progress happens at different speeds. These experiences showed Jose that volunteering is about mentorship, connection, and empowering others. Noticing that many students still needed support after middle school, he plans to help extend mentorship opportunities through a first-generation college student club at Cañada College. Overall, Jose learned that volunteering is less about simply giving time and more about building relationships, fostering confidence, and helping others believe in themselves.

Career Goal: Immigration Lawyer

Quote: *"Through this experience, I've learned that volunteering isn't about giving time, it's about building relationships and creating opportunities for others to grow."*



OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL

Franklin Herrera

Presented by Dennis McBride, Treasurer



It is almost impossible to summarize what Franklin Herrera has done for the youth of the local Redwood City community. We are all familiar with club sports and how young athletes are urged into joining specialized travel teams, usually at significant expense to families, and to the exclusion of families that cannot afford the extravagant additional costs.

But an incident in 2002, at Redwood City's Red Morton Park, involving Herrera and another instrumental figure in youth soccer, Noe Garcia, would forever change the trajectory of youth soccer in Redwood City. During that 1992 soccer game, Franklin and Noe were each coaching their sons' teams, and Noe's son committed a foul. The referee scolded him sternly. Despite being on the opposing team, Franklin intervened, telling the referee that while the foul needed to be addressed, he could have made his point without being quite so harsh.

He was astounded by what he'd heard. "Frank's team was losing. But I could see then that Frank wasn't about winning. For him, it was about the kids, the community, the team, everything except him."

At the time, Noe had been thinking about starting a more competitive team for his son, and Franklin, who clearly knew something about coaching kids' soccer, seemed like an ideal partner. Noe later suggested the idea to Franklin, who accepted his offer, and the pair, working under the authority of Redwood City's Juventus Sport Club, launched one of Redwood City's first competitive youth club soccer teams. What Noe didn't know at that time was that Franklin's gentle giant demeanor and contagious spirit made him an ace recruiter, who thought nothing of approaching kids he didn't know and suggesting that they try playing soccer. With Franklin's success wooing kids onto the field, Juventus added five new youth soccer teams to the end of Franklin and Noe's first coaching season. The partnership between Noe and Frank continued through 2013, when both of their sons had aged out of youth soccer. The two remained in contact, and in 2021, after being disillusioned with profit-seeking local clubs, they founded JASA, a soccer program designed to be affordable and inclusive to the community. The program quickly grew to 43 teams, serving hundreds of players ages 5–18, many from Latino underserved households, especially in the North Fair Oaks area. A few kids lived in shelters. Fees were kept low, families could volunteer to offset costs, and no child was turned away for lack of money or skill. JASA's youth program didn't advertise or have a fancy website. Instead, it relied on what Franklin refers to as "organic growth" that started with the team, not the club. Franklin's soccer journey was motivated by personal experience.

He immigrated to the United States from El Salvador when he was 16, and his father was a dishwasher in Redwood City. They lived in a studio apartment on Broadway. One day, while dribbling a soccer ball near his apartment, Franklin was approached by a local coach who asked if he'd like to join his team. They went to Franklin's apartment to speak to his father, who said he had come to this country to work, not for Franklin to play soccer. The coach persisted, and reassured Franklin's father, and Franklin played the next three years on the club team without paying a penny. Franklin's hurdles impeding his soccer playing days were not over. He developed a rare autoimmune disease, dermatomyositis, that temporarily left him unable to walk, stand, or even swallow. This not only ended his soccer playing days, but it continued to affect him for many years. In 2013, Franklin was admitted to UCSF Medical Center and it was weeks before he was able to take a step, even then with assistance of machines and mechanical lifts. During that time he was comforted and visited by an old friend, Noe. Franklin eventually recovered, and returned to his job as a paraprofessional for kids with special needs at Kennedy Middle School. His rehabilitation plan included daily long walks at Red Morton, where he would watch the JASA soccer teams play. Eventually, JASA merged with Juventus to form JSC Soccer Club, and the program continues to serve many kids in the Redwood City community. Franklin and Noe remain dedicated to ensuring that every child in their community has the chance to play soccer and feel a sense of belonging.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of Redwood City youth have benefited from Franklin's involvement, whether just learning the game, building personal skills and self-confidence, coaching, developing friendships, or to simply find a place of refuge from what can sometimes be a challenging and even troubled day-to-day life. Franklin has been a coach, a counselor, a fundraiser, and a friend to youth in the Redwood City community for many, many years.



OUTSTANDING BUSINESS

Dehoff's Key Market

Presented by Mark Simon, Board Member



Dehoff's Key Market is a family-owned, long-time independent grocery store located in Redwood City which has served its community since its founding. Located at Upton and Roosevelt, it was purchased by Jack and Nancy Dehoff in 1972 with their roots in local lumber and earlier grocery experience. It is known for premium beef, produce, outstanding BBQ, and community service.

Jack Dehoff, a Redwood City native, and 1955 graduate of Sequoia High School, began his career in the grocery business during the 1950s as a teenager, bagging groceries and sorting bottles for the local Lee Bros. grocery chain. At its peak, the Dehoff's Key Market family business expanded to five locations. This included a second Redwood City location on 5th Avenue (known for its olive loaf sandwiches) and other locations in nearby areas like San Mateo. In 2023, the market was honored with an *Exceptional Independent Award* by the National Grocers Association.

Over the years, the size of the Dehoff family has grown as well as the business. Jack and Nancy have five children: Mike, Chris, Pat, Jackie and Colleen and ten grandchildren...so far. Following the family tradition,

they all started working in the store at an early age doing everything from sorting bottles, bagging groceries, to trimming produce. All have stayed in the business and have become active in all aspects including grocery, meat, produce, accounting, point of sale, and nearly everything else.

Chris became the company's general manager in 1988 and he continues to uphold all the ideals created when the business first began. As Chris says, "We are proud of the fact that we're 'locally grown' and have such strong roots here. We think it makes a difference in how we operate, how we take care of our customers, and how we respond to what they need. We've been doing business this way for over 50 years now. It's great to be a real part of our communities, serving families year after year."

The generosity of Dehoff's Key Market to the Redwood City community has been ever-present, whether in the form of donated products, gift cards, or support and services to dozens of local organizations, including schools, sports teams, car shows, churches, and the Redwood City Library, just to name a few. Dehoff's Key Market was among the first grocery stores to begin a "scrip" program, a community fundraising initiative that allows shoppers to support local schools and non-profit organizations through their everyday grocery purchases.

Dehoff's Key Market has been a substantial supporter of local food drives, putting together bags of groceries which they sell at deeply discounted cost for fundraising activities. The list of organizations that have received support from Key Market includes Redeemer Lutheran, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Woodside High, Sequoia High, Menlo-Atherton High, as well as the city of Redwood City. Key Market directly supports Second Harvest and Samaritan House with donations of goods and volunteer efforts.

In addition to being a positive presence in the community, Dehoff's Key Market is a place where customers are greeted by name and long-time employees are eager to help. It is one of those places that makes Redwood City feel like home.



OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD



MARIA FERNANDA MELLADO PENA

Crystal Springs Uplands School

Sponsor: The Sequoia Awards

Presented by Jeri Daines, Chair & Jenny Stahler, Past Chair

Maria Fernanda Mellado Pena is one of our Outstanding Students of 2026 and will receive our top scholarship in the amount of \$25,000.

Maria's journey into volunteerism began with the idea that she could bring her passion for STEM subjects, as well as music, to other young students, especially in under-resourced communities. To that end, Maria has given her time to many organizations to inspire and mentor young minds, starting as a Teacher Assistant at Peninsula Bridge. For two summers in high school, Maria assisted middle school students with math and English, being inspired by the "spark in their eyes" when they grasp the material at hand.

Maria has also played a leadership role in the Science for Causes Club at her high school, which focuses on providing science education to underserved communities on the Peninsula. Maria co-facilitated science presentations on topics such as Elephant Toothpaste, making the instruction fun and interesting to the students.

Maria also served as a guest STEM teacher at the Redwood City Library, teaching young students about science and helping them with their STEM kits. Maria feels that exposure to science education can empower young students and open new doors for them to explore in the future.

Maria's other passion, music, has also been a catalyst for service. She has performed with her school band for many school and community events, including the annual Music in the Mansion concert, at the San Carlos Children's Theater Pit Orchestra, at local restaurants, and with the Stanford Jazz Program. Maria hopes to inspire other young Latinos to get involved with music.

Despite a long list of volunteer experiences outside the home, Maria has also found a way to contribute to her family at home. She leads by example with her younger siblings while helping them with their homework or school projects. Maria also assists and tutors both of her parents, who are ESL and GED students at Cañada College.

Career Goal: Inspired by the medical staff that once saved her father's life in a medical emergency, Maria seeks to continue her STEM path and study Public Health in college en route to a career in medicine.

Quote: *"Volunteering has shown me the importance of using my passions to uplift others and form meaningful relationships with one another to support each other and to ultimately make a lasting positive difference where communities can thrive."*



OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD



DANIELA CUADROS

Carlmont High School

Sponsor: The Sequoia Awards

Presented by Jeri Daines, Chair & Jenny Stahler, Past Chair

Daniela Cuadros is one of our Outstanding Students of 2026 and will receive our top scholarship of \$25,000.

Daniela was inspired to start volunteering at age 5, when she became involved in a holiday gift drive for low-income households. There, she served as a gift wrapper and personal shopper for many families. When she saw and felt the children's joy at receiving gifts, it planted a seed of service that has persevered.

Daniela's volunteerism has taught her that such service is all about connections. She connected and bonded with children like Noah at Common Roots Farm, by communicating with him through the

one way he could, through art. She connected with the parents at Una Vida Farm by caring for their children while they shopped, her reward being the look on the children's faces as their parents returned with a bounty of food for the family. This experience allowed Daniela to gain personal insight, that her passion and interests are in listening to the distinct perspectives of the voices of the people she has helped.

Daniela sacrificed many Friday nights to serve with the Key Club in high school, helping out at local school carnivals, including Nesbit and Henry Ford's seasonal events. There, she connected with community members by balancing dinner plates on her arms, serving glasses of water and dessert bowls, and chatting with them about their lives.

Daniela sacrificed four weeks of her summer volunteering as a camp counselor at The Portola Valley Theater. As camp counselor, Daniela connected with young campers by teaching them not only about stage boundaries, choreography, blocking, and singing, but also about how to treat one another and the environment properly. Her reward, watching the joy on the faces of the campers and their families after each performance.

Daniela says that volunteering has transformed her perception of community involvement.

Career goal: Daniela plans to study International Relations and Latin American Studies, and her goal is to go into law. And if her high school mock trial accomplishments are any indication, she has an excellent chance of succeeding.

Quote: *"My volunteering experience has instilled in me the confidence that the vibrancy and success of a community rests on the shoulders of those who are willing to help and participate."*



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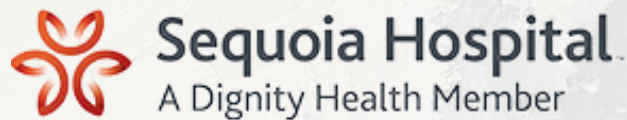


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Jeni Litvinchuk
Realtor
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DRE# 01997001

