

Valley veteran lives Alger life, so earns Alger scholarship



BROWN

By **TITUS GEE**
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PALMDALE — A Valley Army veteran who grew up in foster care and served a year in Iraq is studying to return to the “system,” in order to help other youngsters find the road to success.

A scholarship from the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Veterans is helping him pursue that dream.

When Derric Brown’s cocaine- and PCP-addicted parents went to prison, officials placed him in the foster system, according to a biography from the association.

He lived in 11 foster homes and attended seven high schools, but he managed to graduate with a 3.5 GPA.

Rather than follow his parents’ sordid path, Brown

resolved to find a better life.

He joined the Army straight out of high school and soon found himself in the “sandbox” of Iraq.

“I thought the military experience would turn me into a better man, and I believe it did,” he said. “After a while, the shock wears off, and you get used to the explosions and shooting and seeing someone lying there with a bag over his head. It’s not normal for a person to see, but you get used to it when you’re over there. It’s hard to forget about that stuff when you return home, though.”

When he finished his stint in the Army, Brown moved to Palmdale and started taking classes toward a degree in child and family education.

“I love everything about school ... Every class has something important that I will use in life,” Brown said. “Today, education is the first and foremost thing in my life. The drive and motivation to learn comes from my parents not getting an education. I have also observed the world and have seen how people use education to get where they want to be in life.”

Brown plans to open a group home for kids who face challenges similar to his own.

“I want to support troubled teens,” Brown said. “I don’t want to be a counselor or a social worker for

the simple fact that it won’t have as big an impact as if I’m the director of a group home ... I know firsthand (what they face). Eighty percent of the kids in the foster care system don’t make it to where I am right now. I understand that. But if I can help one other person to be successful, and then he can help another person, for me, that’s enough.”

The Horatio Alger Military Veterans Scholarship supports the education of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan with awards of \$5,000. To apply, a vet must demonstrate: an honorable service record; United States citizenship or permanent residency; a 2.0 GPA; and plans to pursue a bachelor’s degree. More than 1,400 have received the scholarship since it began in June 2005. Ambassador George Argyros and his wife Julia established the scholarship fund with an initial donation of \$10 million. This year, the Argyros donated another \$5 million, association officials said.

Brown said the scholarship helped move his finances in the right direction, but there are still challenges ahead.

“As long as I keep trying, then I know I’m doing all right,” he said. “If I quit, I’m not going to be right with myself. I can’t give up.”

The veterans scholarship program is one of three offered by the association, which also offers a national scholarship program and several state scholarship programs.