

ARIZONA REPUBLIC

April 10, 2009

Decision to embrace education pays

Goodyear teenager's family difficulties result in renewed effort to secure future academically

By Megan Gordon

THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

Facing much adversity, Javier Garcia had few options.

His family was evicted from their home after his stepdad went to jail. Garcia, a ninth-grader at the time, was failing classes and missing school.

That's when Garcia decided he needed to make a change.

Three years ago this month, he allowed a Goodyear family to help him, and his life was forever altered.

"At first, I didn't want to accept help from the Duncans," said Garcia, now 18. "But then I realized I needed the help. I just realized both my parents were unable to support a family because they don't have much education so I thought, 'What the heck, I'll be different.'"



Javier Garcia

In May, Garcia will graduate from Agua Fria High School in Avondale — the first in his family to achieve a diploma.

But Garcia's achievements don't end there.

He was accepted at the University of Arizona in Tucson for enrollment this fall and

was one of two Arizona students selected for the prestigious Horatio Alger National Scholarship.

More than 41,000 students across the U.S. applied and 104 were chosen for the \$20,000 scholarship, said Carrie Blewitt, Horatio Alger Association spokeswoman.

UA is matching Garcia's four-year scholarship, she said.

Last week, he joined the other scholars for a weeklong, all-expense-paid conference in Washington, D.C., for awards cer-

emonies, sightseeing and even panel discussions with actor Denzel Washington.

The scholarship celebrates the American Dream and gives students the opportunity to achieve that goal, Blewitt said.

"He started realizing if his mother or his stepfather had had the opportunity to get an education, they probably would have been able to support their family," said Kathleen Duncan, Garcia's guardian. "He realized that education is the key."

Garcia moved in with the Duncans in the spring of his freshman year. Since then, she said, the family has supported him financially and emotionally. But Duncan credits Garcia's self-motivation.

"We have done relatively so little. He has just taken the little bits that we've done and run with it," she said. "By taking the support that he had from around him, he was able to change his situation so he won't ever have to go through those struggles."

Although Garcia played basketball throughout high school, it was academics that drove his acceptance into four major colleges, he said.

No matter how he got there, Garcia is grateful for how his life changed.

Southwest Valley Horatio Alger Arizona Scholars

Fifty students from around the state have received a \$5,000 college scholarship. They were finalists for the national scholarship awarded to Javier Garcia.

The three Southwest Valley scholarship winners are:

- » Cosme Madrid from Trevor G. Browne High School.
- » Maribel Rodriguez from Agua Fria High School.
- » Amanda Roundy from Millennium High School.