

Scholarship will grant one Boys & Girls Club member \$100,000 for college

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The financial burden of a college degree holds back some young people from pursuing it, but thanks to a local scholarship opportunity, one student in Madison will be given \$100,000 to do just that.

The John & Jo Ellen McKenzie Boys & Girls Club College Fund will give up to [\\$100,000 to one Boys & Girls Club member](#) to finance his or her college education over the next four years. The money will be broken down to \$25,000 per year.

John McKenzie, owner of McKenzie Apartment Company in Madison, hired a couple of students through the local Boys & Girls Club internship program to work at his apartment company this summer and was moved by their hard work.

After watching an episode on "CBS Sunday Morning" where an employer went to a fifth grade class and promised to give each student \$1,000 if they go to college, McKenzie had the idea to put one student through college for all four years. So he called Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, and told him of his idea.

"The reason I came up with a hundred grand was, I googled the University of Wisconsin education cost. I broke down tuition, room and board and books and all that and came up to \$25,000 a year," McKenzie said.

After Johnson set up a selection committee for the process, they ran the criteria by McKenzie, who said he wanted the scholarship to favor a student who demonstrated a financial need or would be a first generation college student.

"My hope through all of this is this kid becomes a success and it's a tradition that he or she could pass on, and hopefully he or she would be inspired by people like Michael and give back to the community," McKenzie said.

Applicants were asked to write a 1,000 word essay on why they believed they deserved the scholarship. They were also asked to provide a current high school transcript, two letters of recommendation, and had to be a member of the Boys & Girls

Club at the time of submitting the application.

Priority was given to students who demonstrated a financial need, would be a first generation college student, and students with strong academic success, attendance and involvement in school activities. They also had to be a high school junior, senior or incoming college freshman to be considered.

There were 42 applicants for the scholarship which was narrowed down to three finalists. The three finalists are 17-year-old Cexio Guerrero, 17-year old Cristhabel Martinez and 18-year-old Alexis Johnson. Earlier this week, they each participated in an oral interview where they discussed their academic achievements, college and career goals, and why they believe they deserve the scholarship.

Guerrero, a rising senior at West High School, hopes to pursue a master's degree and go to medical school for psychiatry or surgery after college. He plans on working and tutoring part-time to help people and give back to the community.

Guerrero is an aspiring first generation college student. He said his parents have always stressed the importance of a college education since he was a little boy.

"College is something I felt I've always had to do, ever since I was young, so that's why I put so much effort into school," Guerrero said. "With the help of this scholarship I feel I'll be able to accomplish all the goals I have for college and help the community and others around me."

Guerrero has been part of the Boys & Girls Club since his freshman year. He said he joined because he learned the program helps students get through high school and it gives back to the community.

"I'm a very hard-working and dedicated person when it comes to anything put before me that I want to get done and accomplished. Whether it's school or helping in the community or giving a speech like I'm doing right now, I'll put in all my effort, do my best and try and stay positive no matter what," Guerrero said.

Cristhabel Martinez, who is also entering her senior year at West, plans to go to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to major in social work and get a certificate in criminal justice. Martinez has taken honors and AP courses at her school and will begin taking classes this fall at the UW-Madison as a special student to study Spanish. Special students at the university are individuals who want to take classes for credit but are not currently enrolled in a UW-Madison degree program.

Like Guerrero, Martinez will also be the first in her family to pursue a college degree. She currently works two part-time jobs to help support her family because her parents are unable to work full-time due to disability. After undergrad, Martinez plans to go to law school.

"I've had family members close to me who've had to deal with the law. Immigration status is something that I'm close with and I've seen people close to me involved in the juvenile system and I want to be able to make an impact and contribute to the community," Martinez said.

After law school, Martinez wants to build an organization that gives at-risk youth a second chance to restore a relationship with their families.

Alexis Johnson will be a freshman at New York University this fall where she plans to major in environmental studies. She is a La Follette High School graduate where she said being a part of the dance team was something memorable for her.

"Just making the team was a really big deal. I didn't have a lot of dance experience so I kind of tried out to see how much fun it would be to meet new people," Johnson said. "It was very satisfying to perform in front of other people, make up new dances, make new friends and I got a chance to explore a different part of me that I hadn't really gotten to before and I think that was very satisfying personally."

Johnson had a 3.89 GPA and took AP and honors classes at La Follette. She chose NYU because

she fell in love with New York City after visiting in middle school and always wanted to go back.

“Culturally, New York itself is just so diverse, there’s so many different people there and you literally can meet anyone from anywhere in the world and so I was excited to learn new things from other people and have new experiences,” Johnson said.

Johnson got into environmental studies after reading a blog post on how the honeybee population in the United States is in decline. She said it opened her eyes to the problems occurring in the environment and wanted to educate herself more on the issues so she can educate others.

After college, Johnson wants to work with an environmental program for children that teaches them the basics of sustainability, like recycling and preserving resources.

To give back to the community during her college years, Johnson plans on volunteering and tutoring.

“I’ve always enjoyed being a positive role model and I’m a positive role model to my brothers. I enjoy tutoring and helping other students at Mt. Zion (church) and even the freshmen and underclassmen at La Follette. I think I would be a very good spokesperson for the scholarship and I think I would represent it very well,” Johnson said.

The winner of the scholarship will be announced Aug. 20th at a BG CDC donor appreciation event. It will be held at Taft Street Boys & Girls Club, 2001 Taft St. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m., the program will begin at 6 and the winner will be announced between 7-7:15.

Michael Johnson was able to raise approximately \$7,500 total for the two remaining candidates to use towards their college funds.

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