



## **Northern California COMTO – FALL 2010 Scholarship Recipients**

### **ROSA PARKS AWARD RECIPIENT (\$2,000)**

**Denisse Gonzalez** of South San Francisco, California, a junior at the University of California, Berkeley, is majoring in Political Science with a 3.6 G.P.A. While growing up, her single mother struggled financially to care for her and her younger sister. Seeing the ever-increasing stress on her mother, Denisse dropped out of high school, so that she could work to help support her family. She did not want her sister distracted by financial difficulty, but instead, focus on her high school education. Her sister completed high school with an impressive 3.9 GPA, earning a scholarship to the University of San Francisco. With her sister in college, Denisse focused her attention on continuing her education by enrolling in a local community college, Skyline College in San Bruno, California. While at Skyline College, she worked in the HERMANAS program as a mentor. She succeeded at helping Latino students that were at risk of not graduating high school. These students graduated from high school and are now in their second year at Skyline College. Denisse has also served on the Blue Ribbon Committee, formed to restructure the South San Francisco Unified School District education plan, because it had failed to meet the No Child Let Behind Act of 2001. Denisse's career goals include serving on the South San Francisco City Council, and later in the State legislature. She believes, as a Mexican American immigrant, she can provide firsthand experience and cultural perspective on unique challenges faced by Mexican Americans as an underrepresented group. As a public official, she would work at ensuring this community receives adequate resources. Denisse sees her interest in politics and policy directly related to transportation. Her plans to become an elected office would include working on solutions to current transportation issues. She wants to serve as an "ally for COMTO" and to advocate for the organization's mission in ensuring a level playing field in the transportation industry for people of color.

### **CURTIS GREEN AWARD RECIPIENTS (\$1,500)**

**Delane Sims** of Oakland, California, a junior at the University of California, Berkeley, is majoring in American Studies with a 4.0 G.P.A. Delane became a mother at the age of fifteen. At the age of sixteen, she was provided the opportunity to attend Mills College, but having to care for her child prevented her from attending. She saw herself having a bleak future without a college education. Years later, in 2006, while employed as a manicurist, she enrolled in Berkeley City College. Delane immersed herself in college life, maintaining a high G.P.A. and holding the office of student body senator. She received the Chancellors Trophy Award, the highest honor given by the Peralta School District. Receiving this award motivated Delane to continue her education and to give back to her college community. Inspired by the book *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, Delane pursued and succeeded at bringing a Sudanese refugee to speak at her school. The story told by this refugee was so powerful that people still approach Delane to tell her how much they were positively affected. Delane continues to give back by tutoring students at Berkeley Community college while maintaining a 4.0 G.P.A. at the University of California, Berkeley. Her career goal is to help senior citizens and to continue the development of the volunteer group Senior Moments, which she founded five years ago. Since its inception, Senior Moments has helped many senior citizens with housing, healthcare, food, and transportation needs. Delane received the Jefferson Award for her work with senior citizens. In addition to her work with Senior Moments, she wants to become the first African American female director of the California Department of Health and Aging. She feels that being in this position will enable her to effect policy changes the "will improve the quality of life for all seniors."

**Shavonnee Clark** of Oakland, California, is a sophomore at the University of California, Los Angeles, majoring in Political Science with a 3.5 GPA. Shavonnee grew up where violence and crime were commonplace. In 2008, she was personally impacted by this circumstance, when she suddenly lost her father whom fell victim to the violence. After losing her father, Shavonnee wanted give up on her dreams and her life. Pursuing a college education became unimportant to her. Fortunately, with the support of her mother and her high school teacher, Shavonnee regained her motivation to make a bright future for herself. Her unfortunate experience has motivated her get an education in order to escape the environment that claimed her father's life. Shavonnee plans to pursue a law degree. She is passionate about working to improve living conditions of underrepresented and underprivileged communities. That is why, after attaining her law degree, Shavonnee will start a non-profit organization that will focus on helping Oakland youth.

### **SHARON BANKS AWARD RECIPIENTS (\$1,000)**

**Josue Chavarin** of Salinas, California is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in Political Science with a 3.2 G.P.A. Josue grew up in a Mexican immigrant family of seven in an immigrant community in Salinas, California. He recalls days when his parents did not have enough money to pay their utility bills or transportation. Josue would walk twenty blocks to get to school. Josue has witnessed poverty and "a cycle of violence that has created a system that condones despair within ethnic minorities." Many of the children that Jose grew up with are either dead or serving time in the criminal justice system. It is because of his experience with poverty and violence that Josue has decided to dedicate his life to defending the rights of "disempowered minorities and to show them that they also can engage in our political and social systems to spur change in their communities." Josue plans to attend law school and to attain a master's degree in public policy. Josue has volunteered at Centro Legal de La Raza in East Oakland. He assisted attorneys in documenting workers' rights violations and the immigrants they served. While attending college, Josue helps his mother raise his younger siblings, because his father works as a field laborer and is away from his family eight months of the year. Josue's goal is to serve California as an attorney and hold a position in a local office. He wants to effect positive change through legal and political venues.

**La Shay Morris** of Oakland, California, is a senior at San Francisco State University majoring in Health Education and Urban & City Planning with a 3.0 G.P.A. La Shay's parents taught their children the value of having moral character, despite having to live in a community plagued by drug related violence. La Shay is one of six children, and is the only child to attend college. She strives to excel in educational pursuits. She plans to attain her master's degree in Public Health & Dietetics and a Ph.D in Urban Planning. After completing her education, La Shay said she "will return to my community and continue to make a contribution." La Shay works three part-time jobs to support herself while attending college

**Chelsey Kamson** of San Ramon, California is a sophomore at the University of California, Riverside majoring in Biological Sciences with a 3.5 G.P.A. Chelsey's career goal is to become a pediatric oncologist. She is motivated by the challenges her younger brother and family faced when he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia at the age of four in 2005. Her brother's illness took a heavy emotional toll on Chelsey as she experienced long periods without her mother, whom was totally dedicated to caring for her brother. This would entail her mother having to make constant trips to the hospital and performing nursing duties when she was at home. Chelsey overcame the challenges presented by the experience. The pain and frustration that she felt turned into motivation to pursue a career in the health industry. Chelsey aspires to help children with life threatening blood diseases. She wants "to have a positive impact on these children and pray to be able to treat and cure 100% of the children."

**Summer Clark** of Rodeo, California, is a junior at Hampton University majoring in Business Management with a 3.8 G.P.A. Summer plans to pursue a master's degree in Business Management and a Ph.D in Business Administration. Upon completion of her education, she wants to become a management consultant and to work with underprivileged youth in the Bay Area, in order to prepare them for college. She received her Associates Degree from Heald College while working full-time at Youth Uprising, a youth development center in Oakland. While at Youth Uprising, Summer performed violence prevention, outreach, and mentoring.

**Eliazar Chacha** of Oakland, California, is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in African American Studies & Interdisciplinary Studies with a 3.6 G.P.A. Eliazar grew up poor in Richmond, California, even though his parents attended the University of California, Berkeley, after receiving scholarships from their native Tanzanian government. They struggled financially to care for Eliazar and his four siblings. Eliazar said that his parents "embraced their struggle because it was seen as honorable to give back to the country, community, and village that had given so graciously to them." Eliazar has chosen not wait until he completes his education to start effecting global change. As an active member of the African Immigrants Social and Cultural Services Youth group, he commits his summers to collecting medical supplies to ship to Shirati Hospital in Tanzania. Eliazar tutors underprivileged men of color at Longfellow Middle School, King Middle School, and Willard Middle School. He also does community outreach for Education 190, constantly advocating for "diversity in higher education because of the benefit it has for all students." Eliza plans to pursue a JD and PhD in African American Studies. Upon completion of his education, he will work toward becoming a Constitutional Law Professor.

**Jesus Gonzalez** of Freedom, California, is a senior at San Jose State University and Cabrillo College majoring in civil engineering with a 3.6 G.P.A. Jesus grew up in Watsonville, California, among field workers and others whom earned only minimum wage. He decided to get a college education, so that he would have more employment opportunities to pursue and to become economically self-sufficient. Jesus has always been fascinated with structures and buildings. He dreams of designing and building amazing buildings in the future. While growing up, his family repeatedly told him "Tienes que estudiar," which means, "you need to study." Jesus attributes his success thus far to his family's support. He recently earned a spot on the College of Engineering Deans List and has been awarded many certificates of recognition. Jesus has worked as an intern during the summers, testing aggregate materials and surveying quarries. He plans to become a project manager and to gain as much knowledge and experience in the engineering field as possible.

### **AWARD OF MERIT RECIPIENTS (\$1,000)**

**Onyinye Okwandu** of Diamond Bar, California, is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with a 3.3 G.P.A. Onyinye understands the environmental struggles faced by low-income communities. She has worked with service organizations to gain greater insight of the realities of social inequalities that lead to environmental concerns that go unaddressed in these communities. This experience has motivated Onyinye to pursue a law career. She wants to work with organizations, such as the Environmental Protection Agency to "create more sustainable conditions for communities, especially communities of color." This spring, Onyinye will work on a research project for the McNair Scholar Program. She will study interesting environmental issues relevant to local communities.

**Ada Nwadugbo** of Oakland, California, is senior at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in Public Health with a 3.2 G.P.A. Ada was raised by a single mother, whom impressed upon her the importance of education. Ada works hard to be a positive role model to her brothers and others in her community. She wants to give back by helping combat health problems that affect those in her community. Ada wants to develop preventative measures to help people avoid serious health problems. She plans to pursue an MPH and MD after completing her undergraduate work.

**Christopher Hill** of San Francisco, California, is a junior at the University of San Francisco majoring in Business Administration with a 3.7 G.P.A. As a high school student, Christopher did not think he would attend college. He lacked the desire and the motivation. It did not help that he was exposed to negative influences within his community. With the support of his mother and with help he received from his church, Christopher turned his life around. As a junior, he has steadily improved academically. Christopher recognizes the importance of a constant support system in his life. He said that he has “been blessed tremendously” by those around him. He wants to “seek ways to give back” for all that he has received. Christopher plans to pursue a career in the transportation industry.

**Mario Carroll** of Berkeley, California, is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in Political Science/Rhetoric with a 3.4 G.P.A. While growing up in a low-income family as one of nine children, Mario had to overcome challenges to get where he is today. He received support from an academic program that helped him to become motivated to achieve goals, including completing college. Mario plans to attain a JD and MBA. His future goals include a career in politics.

**Erica Odukoya** of Ontario, California, is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in Public Health with a 3.4 G.P.A. This past summer, Erica interned with Prevention International, a small non-profit with the mission of saving women of the developing world from cervical cancer. This organization has succeeded at opening free clinics in Africa, South America, and India. Erica’s experience with this organization has motivated her to pursue work that will save people around the world. After graduating, she will work with Ameri-Corps for one year. Erica plans to attend medical school to become a gynecologist. She wants to help women, particularly women of color, to be aware of the various diseases that disproportionately affect them.

**LaDell Erby** of Tracy, California, is a junior at Cal Poly State University majoring in City & Regional Planning. Having lived in metropolitan areas with great access to transit and areas with far less accessible transportation, LaDell understands the impact of transportation on the economic, social and cultural progress of people – the importance of being able to get from one destination to another. After completing his undergraduate work, he will apply to the University of California, Berkeley’s MCP/MS transportation Engineering Degree Program. LaDell plans to pursue a career in transportation. He wants to “obtain a Director position in the transportation industry so that I may play an important role in organizing a successful, comprehensive, and innovative plan in my community and region.”