



PHILANTHROPY

Women's Educational Success gets \$200,000 gift

Cabrillo program that supports students on financial precipice receives largest donation in its history

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APTOS — Sara Hemingway has been attending Cabrillo College for 19 years.

That may seem like a long time, but Hemingway, 38, has cleared more hurdles on her way to an education than most people face in a lifetime.

On Friday, at the annual luncheon for the Cabrillo Foundation's Women's Educational Success organization,

Hemingway, for her fierce perseverance, received the first Emily Maloney Grant.

Maloney, an attorney who was a member of the philanthropic group and died in 2010 at age 80, left Women's Educational Success \$200,000 from her estate. It was the largest gift in the organization's history.

Hemingway came to the U.S. from Mexico as a child and was later taken

from her parents and placed in foster care. She gave birth to a daughter when she was 16.

She graduated from Santa Cruz High School and started attending Cabrillo College when she was 19.

Later, she got married and had a second daughter. Then, when her daughter was 2, her husband died.

She grieved, and she carried on. After four years on the wait list, she got into Cabrillo's nursing program. Then, during finals in November, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.



Lisa Mead, Heather Nicholls, Shalene Cruz, Yuneisy Bermudez and Sara Hemingway are some of the students getting grants from Women's Educational Success, part of the Cabrillo Foundation.

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"I was like, 'Seriously?' " she said. "I just got over my husband's death and started the nursing program. Things had just stabilized for my family, and I had to drop out."

She took a semester off, and chemotherapy sent her cancer into remission. She wanted to return to school, but how would she care for her now 8-year-old daughter, cover mounting medical expenses and go to school?

That's when Women's Educational Success stepped in and gave Hemingway \$500 to cover child care.

Started in 1997 by Cabrillo trustee Rachel Spencer and Peggy Downes Baskin, the organization raises money from women to help other women. The first year it handed out \$1,000 in grants to students who needed emergency financial assistance for everything from textbooks to car repairs.

"The timing for Emily Maloney's gift couldn't be better," Spencer said. "The need is greater than ever, and for the first time ever we've run through this term's allotment for grants before the term ended."

One reason for the growing need, besides the down economy, could be that the per-credit fee at all California community colleges jumped from \$26 to \$36

this term, Spencer said.

This year, 314 donors gave at least \$100, and the organization will cut checks totaling \$32,000. Next year, the total endowment is expected to reach \$1 million.

Many of the recipients hang on the financial edge, balancing jobs, children and school.

Heather Nicholls, 37, told the story of how her husband started using methamphetamine and disappeared for several days. She and her 16-year-old son wound up living out of her Buick sedan for a short period.

As the 2011 fall term at Cabrillo approached, Nicholls' financial aid had yet to arrive and she couldn't make rent. The group came through with a grant so

she could stay in her studio apartment.

"Women's Educational Success is an organization that pushes other women through hardship," Nicholls said. "It's about more than the money. It's about knowing that there is a group of women in the community that, without even knowing me, were willing to help."

Hemingway is back in school and should finish the nursing program this year. She said she would like to become an oncology nurse.

"This grant has made it possible for me to finish what I started 19 years ago," she told the gathered women in the audience. "One day I want to be one of you guys. I want to be a donor."