



# Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

*To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...*

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** April 10, 2024    **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia    **PHONE:** 909-445-1001

## **Whittier Union Senior with Gift for Designing Receives \$50,000 Edison Scholarship**

**WHITTIER** – Whittier High School senior Erik Villa rarely stops to catch his breath. Between his schoolwork, mentoring classmates in the school’s Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT), volunteer work for the Whittier Chamber of Commerce, and managing a Whittier juice bar, Villa goes nonstop from sunup to sundown with a goal of helping anybody who needs his assistance.

An unsuspecting Villa was sitting with his CAT classmates when a representative from Edison International came into the class with a surprise announcement – Villa had been named a 2024 Edison Scholarship winner, an honor that comes with \$50,000 in tuition support for students pursuing a major in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) field.

Following the announcement, Villa’s classmates erupted in applause. Villa was soon joined by his mother, Priscilla Villa, and older sisters Denise and Janice, who came up and tearfully embraced Erik. Villa is one of just 30 Southern California high school students to receive the award.

“This is surreal and life-changing. Thank you for this incredible honor,” Villa said. “This scholarship means the world to me. I wish everyone could receive an opportunity like this. My goal is to inspire as many people as I can to pursue their passions.”

Villa – who boasts a 3.85 GPA, serves as a Whittier High Associated Student Body officer, plays volleyball, and is a member of the Puente Program – has committed to Cal State Long Beach, where he will study mechanical engineering, a field he said he enjoys for its emphasis on creativity and problem-solving.

“To be a mechanical engineer, you have to be outgoing and keep a positive attitude, because when you fail you have to pick yourself back up and keep going,” Villa said. “Engineering has taught me that every piece of the puzzle is important and has to be perfectly crafted, otherwise you have to go back to the drawing board, and that’s what I love about it.”

Villa’s love for STEM began in elementary school when his father gave him a robot. Despite receiving no instructions on how to proceed, Villa successfully coded and programmed the robot and has never looked back. Villa said that CAT is the anchor in his life and a home away from home.

CAT is a four-year engineering pathway that provides a wide range of technological tools for students: CNC milling machines, laser cutters, 3-D printers, and banner printers.

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In the class, Villa helps to design, build and complete projects for a variety of clients – student groups, faculty, local businesses, and the city of Whittier.

“Erik is a special person; I can’t say enough about him. He is outgoing and wants to be a leader in any field that he is involved in,” Whittier High CAT teacher Dan Oliver said. “Erik is one of CAT’s design specialists and brings a tremendous amount of energy to the class, helping to mentor underclassmen. I have no doubt Erik is going to take the world by storm.”

Inspired by his mother, Villa has brought his infectious enthusiasm to the Boys & Girls Club of Whittier, where he has served as a youth math tutor, savoring the moments when he is certain he has made a difference in a young child’s life. Villa also volunteers extensively with the Whittier Chamber, helping set up community events and networking with local businesses.

“We are ecstatic for Erik and his family,” Whittier High Principal Tim Liggett said. “The recognition by Edison reflects the hard work and dedication that Erik puts in every single day. The scholarship also personifies the tremendous work being done by Dan Oliver and Steve Swanson in our CAT pathway. We would love to see a CAT student receive an Edison scholarship every year. Congratulation, Erik!”

### PHOTO CAPTIONS

**WUHS\_D\_EDISON1:** Whittier High School senior Erik Villa is all smiles after learning he had been named a 2024 Edison Scholar. The prestigious scholarship, given to just 30 Southern California high school seniors, provides \$50,000 in tuition support for students committed to majoring in a STEM subject. Villa plans to go to Cal State Long Beach to study mechanical engineering.

**WUHS\_D\_EDISON2:** Whittier High School senior Erik Villa, seen with his sisters Denise and Janice, and mother Priscilla, is ready to embark on his higher education journey after being named a 2024 Edison Scholar. Villa is a member of Whittier High’s Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT), which has provided him with the technological tools needed to pursue a career in engineering and design.

**WUHS\_D\_EDISON3:** Whittier High School senior Erik Villa celebrates with his friends and Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT) classmates after being named a 2024 Edison Scholarship winner. The Edison scholarship provides \$50,000 in tuition support for students committed to majoring in a STEM subject. CAT is a four-year CTE pathway that prepares students for careers in STEM fields.

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#### OUR MISSION:

The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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