

NEWS RELEASE

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Covina-Valley Unified Senior's Resilience, Academic Prowess Earns Her \$90K in Scholarships

COVINA, CA – South Hills High School senior Nicole Lee walked into an assembly at the school's Student Union expecting to celebrate the announcement of a classmate's college decision. Once the event began, however, Lee realized that the spotlight was on her when Edison International presented her with a \$50,000 college scholarship.

Each year, the Edison Scholarship is awarded to students pursuing a career in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) to empower them to change the world. Lee is one of only 30 Southern California high school seniors awarded the scholarship this year.

"I heard the Edison Scholarship mentioned and I was like, 'Oh wait, did I get the scholarship?'" said Lee, who received an enthusiastic ovation from South Hills High School classmates and staff during the presentation on March 30. "This is amazing. I am a first-generation college student, and this opportunity will really help me further my education."

Later, Lee was surprised with more good news: she was chosen for the Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship and Internship, which includes a \$40,000 college scholarship and a 12-week software or hardware engineering internship at Amazon that she will complete after her freshman year of college.

Lee was born deaf in her left ear and hard of hearing in her right ear before she went fully deaf in 2019. Her family emigrated from China in 2002 and had to overcome a language barrier, as her mother, Jessie Lee, originally did not speak any English.

When she was younger, Lee could only communicate through American Sign Language (ASL), which made it difficult to connect with others, including her mom. She learned to speak and hear thanks to Covina-Valley Unified's Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Program and cochlear implant surgery on her left ear in 2019.

"I am extremely grateful for the DHH Program because before coming to C-VUSD I only used ASL. The District audiologist reevaluated me and believed I could also learn to communicate through speaking and hearing," said Lee, who has received hearing aids, speech therapy, interpreters, and other accommodations since she enrolled in the District and DHH Program in 2011.

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The Covina-Valley DHH Program is available to eligible students from preschool through high school. The program helps students with hearing loss by developing language and literacy skills so that they can build communication proficiency and access the core curriculum.

Edison Government Relations Manager Marissa Castro-Salvati said that Lee's story of strength and resilience, along with her incredible academic resume, made her stand out from the more than 250 students across Southern California who applied for the award.

"I have always found strength from my mom," Lee said. "She taught me that hard work can lead to success, so I always make sure to try my best because I know that it will pay off in the future."

South Hills High School Principal Dr. Allan Tyner describes Lee as an outstanding, beloved student on campus. She is a member of South Hills High's Girls Who STEM Club, Women's Empowerment Student Association, Husky Signers Club, and Key Club. Lee's class schedule also includes several Advanced Placement classes as well as an International Baccalaureate course.

"Nicole is not just an outstanding student but has challenged herself with rigorous coursework and maintained all As on top of that," Tyner said. "She's had to overcome some things in her life but she works hard and doesn't let anything hold her back."

Lee has yet to finalize her college decision but said she is considering studying electrical engineering and computer science at the University of California, Berkeley. Computer science, specifically the field of artificial intelligence, is a passion she discovered and developed in C-VUSD.

"Nicole is a picture of strength and resilience and is well deserving of the Edison and Amazon scholarships," C-VUSD Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Eminhizer said. "She is an outstanding scholar, committed community volunteer, creative inventor, and compassionate young woman – receiving these scholarships will help Nicole pursue her goal of a career in STEM."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

CVUSD_EDISON1: South Hills High School senior Nicole Lee (left) is surprised with a \$50,000 Edison Scholarship from Edison Government Relations Manager Marissa Castro-Salvati (right) on March 30.

CVUSD_EDISON2: Nicole Lee, a senior at South Hills High School, was one of 30 Southern California high school students selected as Edison Scholarship recipients in 2022-23. She also received the Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship and Internship in April.

CVUSD_EDISON3: Nicole Lee (center) celebrates with her older brother Vincent (left) and mother Jessie (right) after she was presented with the Edison Scholarship for her outstanding academics and story of strength and resilience. Nicole was born hard of hearing and is a second-generation American whose mother emigrated from China.

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