



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 24, 2024 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Senior Receives Gates Scholarship to Pursue Biomedical Engineering Degree

WHITTIER – Whittier High School senior Yolanda Mares will never forget the day in chemistry class when she created a large, fiery burst of smoke as part of an experiment. Seeing the colorful plume – a chemical reaction known as “purple haze” – immediately inspired Mares to dedicate her studies to science and technology, culminating in Mares serving as president of the school’s prestigious Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT) in her senior year.

Working in collaboration with her CAT classmates, Mares spent the 2023-24 school year designing, coding, and perfecting a fully programmable prosthetic arm, a project that has pushed Mares closer to her post-secondary education goals – to major in biomedical engineering at an elite university, on her way to a career working with artificial organs and prosthetics.

Mares is one step closer to her dream after being named a 2024 Gates Foundation Scholar, which comes with a full-ride scholarship that will cover the cost of her tuition and other expenses. Mares plans to attend the University of California, Irvine.

“I’m ecstatic over receiving a Gates scholarship,” Mares said. “I feel very honored. Receiving this scholarship proves to me that all my hard work is paying off. I like chemistry and I like working in teams. In CAT, we really are a family. It’s a supporting environment where I have received tremendous guidance and met so many wonderful people, who are now a part of my family.”

Mares, who boasts a 4.43 GPA, is fully committed to her academics, as evidenced by her inclusion on the Whittier High Principal’s List and the Cardinal 75 top students list and by earning a California State Seal of Biliteracy.

In addition to serving as CAT president, Mares is the treasurer of the chemistry club, serves as a student mentor, is a member of the Whittier Union Student Chamber of Commerce, and has participated in the Puente Program and the school’s 2023 Mock Trial presentation.

“Yolanda has been an outstanding CAT leader, pushing our students to be a part of everything we do,” Whittier High science teacher Dan Oliver said. “Something that I really respect is how with the few days left in her CAT career she has been so instrumental in helping us build the strongest, most inclusive and diverse leadership team. She is ensuring that CAT will continue to be strong.”

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But as much as Mares loves immersing herself in science and coursework, she never misses a chance to join her classmates in invigorating extracurricular activities.

Mares has lent her talent both on and off stage as a member of Whittier High’s theater department, helping build sets and run a spotlight during the school’s production of “Mamma Mia” and appearing on stage as Pilar in “Legally Blonde: The Musical.” Mares also has suited up for the annual Cardinal Powderpuff game, helping lead her junior class to victory last year.

Mares has also been known to show her humanitarian side as a member of the school’s Helping Paws Club, including advocating for the rescue of a cat who climbed up a palm tree on campus.

As a Gates scholar, Mares is the second member of CAT to receive a prominent scholarship, joining classmate Erik Villa, who received a \$50,000 2024 Edison Scholarship in April.

“We are so proud of Yolanda for being named a Gates Scholar and know that she will use her education to continue her work developing technology that will benefit humanity,” Whittier High Principal Tim Liggett said. “Yolanda’s recognition is further evidence that our CAT program, through the guidance of Dan Oliver and Steve Swanson, is doing a sensational job preparing our students for the jobs of the future.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

WUHSD_GATES1: Whittier High School senior Yolanda Mares celebrates her recognition as a 2024 Gates Foundation Scholar with her Cardinal Academy of Technology teachers, Steve Swanson (left) and Dan Oliver (right). Mares plans to attend the University of California, Irvine and study biomedical engineering, on her way to a career working with artificial organs or prosthetics.

WUHSD_GATES2: Whittier High School senior Yolanda Mares (left) displays a prosthetic arm she designed and coded as part of her Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT) senior project. Mares, who serves as the CAT president, was recently named a 2024 Gates Foundation Scholar, receiving a full-ride scholarship that will cover her higher education costs.

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