

Community Business

'I was that kid!' Musings from a long-ago scholarship recipient now working on the other side of philanthropy

By Louis Medina

On an outing recently, my mother and I started reminiscing about my high school days and some of the scholarships I received that allowed me to attend the University of Southern California.

While I went to school in the early '80s — a different, much more affordable time for higher education — USC, a private school, was still very expensive by the day's standards.



Louis Medina

As the firstborn son of immigrant parents who didn't really understand the ins and outs of the U.S. university system, I knew I couldn't count

on my mom and dad to help me navigate through college applications, financial aid forms and class schedules. I also knew they could not afford to pay for my tuition.

Financial angst, therefore, was something I dealt with, like many other college students do, throughout my university years and until I was able to pay off the last of my student loans.

But knowing that there were philanthropists in the community, kind donor angels who believed in me enough to help me afford college when my parents couldn't, not only helped ease my financial burden, but also taught me that I mattered. Two things for which I'll always be grateful. My parents, too.

Fast Forward

Now I work on the other side of philanthropy. And while my work at Kern Community Foundation is focused on helping Kern's hard-working community-based organizations through our nonprofit strengthening initiative, I like to cheer on the efforts of our other important initiative, educational attainment, every chance I get.

Why? Because whenever I consider that almost three-quarters of KCF scholarship recipients are the first in their family to attend college, and that many of them come from immigrant families like I did, I think back to my university days and say to myself, "I was that kid!"



East Bakersfield High School, Ann Biglar

Betting on a Sure Thing: Kern Futures

Kern's generous business community is asked to "give back" to charity throughout the year: fundraiser here, clothing or food drive there, event sponsorship, silent auction. So why should it also consider investing in educational philanthropy through KCF's Kern Futures Scholarship Program?

Well, for several reasons.

First, investing in our youth, Kern's future, is the best winning bet anyone could make. Today's youth will be tomorrow's leaders, and the better we can equip them — through higher education — to tackle that daunting task, the better our city, county, state, nation and world will be.

Second, KCF takes the burden out of having to manage or even establish a scholarship fund. Through our "Scholarships Now" option, for example, scholarship investors like Maya Cinemas or Bakersfield Downtown Rotary — Waterman Foundation support dozens of students one year a time for a mere \$100 fee per scholarship award, regardless of the size of the scholarship. We identify applicants, allow investors to participate in the selection process,

and provide important guidance to scholarship recipients once they are selected, to ensure that they not only get into college

KCF takes the burden out of having to manage or even establish a scholarship fund. Through our "Scholarships Now" option, for example, scholarship investors like Maya Cinemas or Bakersfield Downtown Rotary — Waterman Foundation support dozens of students one year a time for a mere \$100 fee per scholarship award, regardless of the size of the scholarship.

but stay in college and graduate.

Third, scholarship investors receive ample acknowledgement for their contribu-



tions, from being able to name their scholarship, to enjoying public recognition — even as presenters — at scholarship award nights, to being mentioned in KCF's annual report to the community.

Fourth, establishing a scholarship fund is also a possibility, but that requires a minimum investment of \$25,000 in an endowed fund through our "Scholarships Forever" option. However, this amount can be raised over three years. The larger monetary commitment through an endowed scholarship fund gives investors the satisfaction of knowing their dollars will continue to ensure an educational future for Kern's college-bound youth in perpetuity.

For youth, KCF offers:

- An easy online application process that allows them to apply once and be considered for dozens of scholarships managed by the foundation;
- The possibility, depending on available scholarship dollars, to renew their scholarship throughout their college career — as long as they can continue to demonstrate need, full-time enrollment, and a minimum 2.0 GPA; and
- Academic advising, career counseling, transcript review, coordination with their college's financial aid office, and other guidance tips and tools to help them succeed in college and their next big milestone: transitioning into the workforce.

For more information on investing in Kern Community Foundation scholarships, or to volunteer as a reader of personal essays that are part of KCF scholarship applications, call 661-325-5346 or write to info@kernfoundation.org.

Louis Medina is manager of community impact for Kern Community Foundation. The views expressed are his own.