



FRED GLADDIS/ENTERPRISE PHOTOS

Jusely Arredondo, center, receives a city Golden Heart award for overcoming personal challenges from the Davis City Council, from left Rochelle Swanson, Will Arnold (himself a former Golden Heart winner), Mayor Robb Davis, Mayor Pro Tem Brett Lee and Lucas Frerichs.

Three honored with Golden Hearts

By ANNE TERNUS-BELLAMY
Enterprise staff writer

Twenty-five years ago, Davis was rocked by the horrific death of a 14-year-old Holmes Junior High School student.

Andrew Mockus was killed by a group of Davis teens who beat him, robbed him and pushed him into the path of a moving train.

Stunned, the city responded by holding public forums to discuss the issues facing the community's youths and ways the city could do more to help. In the end, the Davis City Council adopted seven recommendations that grew out of the forums, including the creation of the Golden Heart Awards, which would honor local teens for the good that they do. The awards would be given annually in two categories: overcoming personal challenges and community service.

On Tuesday night, three Davis teenagers were honored with Golden Heart Awards during a ceremony before the City Council.

One of them — Jusely Arredondo, awarded a Golden Heart for overcoming personal challenges — even received hers from a previous recipient: City Councilman Will Arnold.

Arredondo, Arnold said, “displays an incredible amount of resilience in the face of significant challenges.”

She arrived at Holmes Junior High as a seventh-grader two years ago knowing almost no English but reached out for support from adults on campus and worked tirelessly, Arnold said.

By eighth grade, Arredondo had made exceptional gains in her English and continually advocated for herself, “showing remarkable insight and maturity for someone so young,” the councilman said.

That maturity was critical when her baby sister died of sudden infant death syndrome

when Arredondo was in eighth grade. She had to grow up even more overnight. But she remains a kind, thoughtful and caring student, friend, daughter and sister, Arnold said, and continues to excel at school.

“She showed so much resilience,” said Holmes counselor Ellen Shields, who nominated Arredondo for the award.

Two Davis teens, meanwhile, received Golden Heart Awards for community service.

Benjamin Hoffner-Brodsky's service to the community began at a young age — he was just 9 years old when he began volunteering with his mom at Davis Community Meals and the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter.

As a member of the Citrus Circuits robotics team, Hoffner-Brodsky organized community service events and assisted in setting up a workshop series to make STEM education accessible to new and low-income robotics teams, Mayor Robb Davis said.

Hoffner-Brodsky even led efforts that raised more than \$140,000 in scholarships and grants for the team and assisted with a women in STEM lecture series to showcase female role models and encourage women to enter engineering fields.

Hoffner-Brodsky did all of that, Davis said, while working through his own challenges.

Two years ago, a member of the community for whom Hoffner-Brodsky's family had been providing housing stepped in front of a moving freight train and took his life.

Hoffner-Brodsky received his suicide note via email while at school. And while many spoke at the memorial service, Davis said, it was Hoffner-Brodsky's poised, deeply personal, articulately delivered and



HOFFNER-BRODSKY

beautifully crafted speech that really resonated with the entire audience.

Also honored for making an impact in her community was Da Vinci Charter Academy senior Rayna Velasquez.

“While other students may be looking for fame and glory, Rayna has her head down, working steadily with a smile on her face,” City Council member Rochelle Swanson said, adding that Velasquez operates at a different level than most high school seniors.

An excellent student with a stellar grade-point average, Velasquez could have chosen from among many four-year colleges, but has decided to live with her grandmother and attend community college in Solano County. She dreams of becoming a social worker and working with foster children.

Velasquez has always been passionate about creating a strong Da Vinci community, Swanson said, and helped do so by becoming an integral member of the school's restorative practices team.

Following 20 hours of training, she helped unveil the school's restorative practices conflict guidelines and continues to serve as a member of the student facilitator team, a group of 14 students who work to model and mediate restorative conversations on campus.

Velasquez also facilitates Friendship Day, a monthly event in which a group of students come together to build community and get to know classmates with whom they would not typically interact. Her influence in creating a supportive and warm school community, Swanson said, “cannot be emphasized enough.”

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