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Unstacking the Odds

Researchers explore gender disparities in the hospitality industry

Hope and Healing One Year Later

October 1 survivor
Karessa Royce speaks out on her own terms

How to Land Your Next Job

Advice for every stage of your career

The Innovation Generation

Hospitality College students have some big ideas on how to move the industry forward—and executives are paying attention

Finding a Path in Education and a Champion Within

Before news arrived of a full-ride scholarship to UNLV and a new car, these seven gifted young women had never really known a free ride. Facing challenges ranging from economic hardship to outright neglect, they pushed forward on pure resilience and the promise of a brighter future

by Angela Ramsey



This past spring, seven recent high school graduates answered a mysterious invitation to The Mansion at MGM Grand. The young guests had little idea what was in store for them when they arrived.

They knew the stakes were high, as they were all in the running for an Epicurean Charitable Foundation (ECF) scholarship—an annual grant awarded to promising hospitality and culinary-arts students based on financial need, academic standing, and the quality of a personal essay.

Despite the fancy setup, the seven young women were under the impression that they had been called in for a final interview.

“I got scared,” says soft-spoken California native Sol Gonzalez Pacheco, who entered The Mansion’s conference room to a bigger-than-usual audience. “I was worried they wouldn’t be able to hear me during the interview and think that I wasn’t confident.”

When the news dropped that in fact all seven had been granted full-ride scholarships to attend the UNLV Harrah College of Hospitality, tension immediately turned to joy. A local television station was there to capture the surprise.

“When the news reporter came out, I knew something was happening,” recounts scholarship recipient Ashley Kozell, “but I was still so confused.”

Fellow winner, Cameron Keenan, reacted similarly: “I was honestly in disbelief! It was surreal to think ... finally, all that hard work paid off!”

Each scholarship recipient was awarded a new car. Left: Cameron Keenan.

The awards were particularly significant for several of the scholarship winners who have overcome obstacles beyond the scope of normal childhood. After the death of her father, Pacheco took on the role of breadwinner (with her older sister), spending hours each day on the bus to and from work. Philippines native Bettina Bautista and Ethiopian-born Brkiti Brhan faced an array of social and cultural challenges after their families immigrated to the U.S.

Meanwhile, parental substance abuse forced then-high school student Paige Owens into the role of parent. “I felt responsible for my three younger brothers,” recalls Owens, whose aunt and grandmother have since moved in to share the workload. “It was so hard to have enough patience. I was forced to grow up quick.”

Since the ECF scholarship program’s inception in 2003, the College of Hospitality has graduated dozens of scholarship winners, many of whom have gone on to occupy high-level management positions in the hospitality industry. For most of the program beneficiaries, the ECF scholarship means the difference between a high school diploma and a university degree.

“Without it, I would never have gone to college,” says Martha Morales ’09, past ECF scholarship winner and current general manager of Nobu Hotel at Caesars Palace.

A teen mother whose family pushed work over education, Morales understands all too well the barriers that can get in the way of a young person’s college dream. That’s one reason why she pays it forward by serving on the ECF board: “It’s amazing to be able to award the scholarship that helped make me successful.”

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On top of covering tuition, books, and all fees, the scholarship offers students vital career mentoring and job-placement support.

and all fees, the scholarship offers students vital career mentoring and job-placement support—backed by ECF’s volunteer network of more than 20 top hospitality industry executives. But for this year’s winners, the gifts didn’t end there. Following the announcement, the young women came out to The Mansion driveway to find seven brand-new cars waiting for them, courtesy of Don Forman at United Nissan in Las Vegas.

“I felt like I was on the *Price Is Right*,” recalls Bautista, “and Drew Carey goes, ‘You won a brand-new car!’ I didn’t think I would be able to ever experience that in my life!”

Those present, including family members, MGM staff, the Forman family, and ECF representatives, knew the moment was significant on many levels. “This was not about giving these young women cars,” says ECF executive director Melissa Arias, “it was about giving them access to life—to doctor’s appointments, to practices, to meetings with their advisers. It opens the world to them.”

It is indeed a completely new world for these seven individuals, one filled with opportunity but also great responsibility—just ask Brhan, who vows to “work even harder” to change her and her family’s lives.

“Pure excitement” is how fellow winner Meagan Taylor sums up her feelings: “All of that time I spent imagining my future? I think it’s here.”

Faces of the Future

These seven ECF scholarship awardees have hit the ground running since arriving at UNLV. Here's a glimpse into what makes them tick.



Bettina Bautista

Age: 18
Hometown: Manilla, Philippines
Hospitality Interest: Restaurant management
Dream Job: Pastry chef
Secret Super Power: Makes the best macaron cookies ever!



Brkiti Brhan

Age: 18
Hometown: Mekelle City, Ethiopia
Hospitality Interest: Hotel management
Dream Job: To run my own hotel
Secret Super Power: Can binge-watch an entire season of a show in a day



Cameron Keenan

Age: 18
Hometown: Las Vegas
Hospitality Interest: Events management
Dream Job: Top event planner
Secret Super Power: Can predict results of *The Bachelor*



Ashley Kozell

Age: 18
Hometown: Las Vegas
Hospitality Interest: Hotel management
Dream Job: Marketing director for a major Strip property
Secret Super Power: Ability to make "time fly" thanks to twice-a-day napping schedule



Paige Owens

Age: 18
Hometown: Las Vegas
Hospitality Interest: Undecided
Dream Job: To be the voice and face of Las Vegas
Secret Super Power: Extraordinary ability to see far distances



Sol Gonzalez Pacheco

Age: 18
Hometown: Santa Maria, California
Hospitality Interest: Events management or food & beverage
Dream Job: To possibly own a business
Secret Super Power: Great athlete (volleyball, track, etc.)



Meagan Taylor

Age: 18
Hometown: Las Vegas
Hospitality Interest: Events and entertainment
Dream Job: To oversee a premier event venue, such as T-Mobile arena
Secret Super Power: Student of Shotokan karate



Did you know every ECF scholarship student is paired with a different ECF board member mentor each year of his or her education?

Highlights of Hospitality Hall's eco-conscious design and construction:

- External water usage was cut in half by incorporating native plants and more efficient irrigation systems.
- The building was oriented on the east-west axis to reduce afternoon sun exposure and heat gain from the low-angle afternoon sun.
- More than 13 percent of construction materials are from local sources, and more than 20 percent consists of recycled content.
- The building was constructed with a "solar-ready" roof.
- Hospitality Hall's light-colored roof and surrounding pavement help avoid contributing to the city's urban heat-island effect.
- Classrooms and offices utilize natural daylight; many are located along the building's perimeter to benefit from direct sunlight.
- Energy-efficient features are projected to save more than 26 percent on energy costs compared with a code-compliant building.
- The Green Alliance Las Vegas awarded Hospitality Hall with its 2018 Community Green Building Legacy Award.

Hospitality Hall Goes Green with LEED Silver

Inspired by the atmosphere of a boutique hotel, Hospitality Hall was designed for the industry, by the industry.

But the sleek, modern decor is much more than a pretty façade—it's also sustainable. In August 2018, the award-winning building received its LEED Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, which evaluated the facility's sustainability and environmental impact across nine categories, including energy efficiency and air quality.