

Michael Brown *of Galveston*



As a very young man, Michael knew he wanted to make a difference in his community. Since middle school he has served in an executive position on the Galveston Youth Advisory Committee. Because of his leadership, Michael is now a voting member of the Mayor's Families, Children and Youth Board of Galveston.

Living with a disabled father, Michael has learned that adversity can be a catalyst for self-improvement. It has inspired him to keep pushing past obstacles to reach his goals.

An incredible self-starter, Michael has organized Galveston's Annual Teen Summit event for the past four years. "The planning for this conference takes months," he said. "We invite nationally-known speakers and hold workshops open to the public. There are games, entertainment, prizes and food. The hardest part is coming up with the money to fund the whole event."

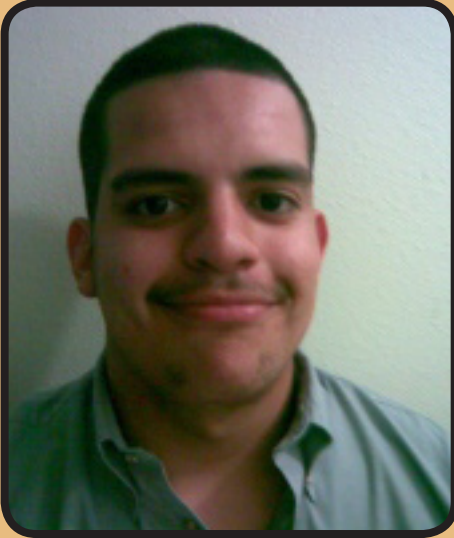
But, under Michael's leadership the committee was able to persuade Subway to donate the food, Walmart to donate the prizes and several local businesses to help with other expenses. "We were determined to overcome our money issues and put on a great event for the young people in our community." Michael said. "The local newspaper and TV news both reported on our fund-raising success."

Michael is in the National Honor Society and tutors high school and elementary school kids. He also plans and coordinates weekly service projects for the Boys and Girls' Club of Galveston.

"My service has made me a more positive and optimistic person," Michael said. "It has allowed me to examine my attitudes, values and beliefs about the world. I firmly believe that I can accomplish just about anything"

Michael plans to be civil engineer.

Omar Chavira *of San Antonio*



“I was a trouble maker in my early high school days, but when my mother passed away I turned into a new man,” Omar explains.

A couple of years later his father had a serious stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body and affected his mind. “For a while it was up to me to make sure bills were paid, dinner was made and the house was cleaned,” Omar said. “My dad has improved a lot, but he can’t work and I still call him everyday during my school breaks to make sure he’s okay.”

Omar’s family financial struggles convinced him to work hard at school “so I can have a good career and take care of my father.” In addition to holding down an afternoon job, he is class president, in the National Honor Society, an officer in both the National English Honor Society and the Spanish Club, and a varsity athlete.

One of Omar’s biggest accomplishments is establishing Big Brothers Big Sisters at his high school. Initiating the entire program from start to finish, Omar compiled information and pictures of area children in need of a mentor and persuaded his peers to get involved. He organized an interview process to determine the “best fits” and created follow-up activities for the new little brother/sister relationships to bloom.

Omar started other outreach programs, such as campus clean-ups “giving the custodians a day off.” In his four years of high school he has accumulated more than 2000 community service hours.

“My hope is to open the door to a better tomorrow,” Omar explained.

Omar plans to pursue a career in medicine.

Karina Sanchez *of Dallas*



As a foster child, Karina was determined “not to end up another statistic. The entire time I was a ‘ward of the state’ I told myself that I would defy expectations and break the cycle of past generations in my family.”

Struggling with an unusually rough home life, Karina stayed focused on her goals to graduate and go on to college. “I’m the first in my family to get this far in school.”

Karina has had to work in order to pay for clothes, backpacks and help her family pay the bills. Throughout this, she has maintained a 3.7 GPA while spending over 1000 hours doing community service.

“Service started off as a way to escape from family issues,” Karina explains. “It has ended up being the most influential factor in my life.”

Spending more than 900 hours inside the Methodist Dallas Medical Center, Karina translates for patients throughout the hospital, including the emergency room, and labor and delivery. “Some patients have no family around them and it feels good to know that I’m there in their time of need.”

Karina also volunteers at Jonathon’s Place, working with troubled children who had been removed from their family because of abuse or neglect. “These kids are in the same position that I was once in,” she said. “I want to make sure that each child knows they have someone to rely on and that good people do exist. The more I volunteer, the more I’m encouraged to pursue my dreams and be the sunshine in someone’s life each and every day.”

After college, Karina plans to go on to medical school.