

THE BOROUGH

STATEN ISLAND

Island students awarded scholarships

*4 honored by
30,000 Degrees
Partnership here*

By Diane C. Lore

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Four Staten Island high school students have been awarded some \$3,000 in scholarships, through Staten Island's 30,000 Degrees college-readiness partnership.

Partners in the 30,000 Degrees initiative announced the winners of a graphic design scholarship logo conducted among students in four borough high schools and sponsored by Wagner College, CSI and St. John's. The contest was to come up with a logo that 30,000 Degrees will use over the next 10 years. The 270 submissions were judged this summer by the principals of the four high schools.

Kevin Carerra of McKee High School, took first place and a \$1,200 scholarship. George Sotiropoulos of Staten Island Tech, took second place, and an \$800 scholarship. Nicholas Velleca of New Dorp High School, and Chynna Cummings, of McKee, won honorable mention, and each won a \$500 scholarship.

Partners in the 300,00 Degree project include the Island's three universities, four public high schools, and the Northfield Savings Bank Foundation, which is funding the project. The project's goal, as its name implies, is to increase the number of persons



High school scholarship winners pose with members of the 30,000 Degree partnership. At center is Kevin Carrera of McKee High School, who won a \$1,200 scholarship. From left to right, front row, are Lily McNair; Mark Erienwein; New Dorp student Nicholas Velleca; George Sotiropoulos; Sharon Henry; Carrera; Dr. William Fritz; James O'Keefe' McKee student Chynna Cummings; Richard Guarasci and Crystal Montalvo. In the rear, from left, are Tim Gannon, Deirdre DeAngelis and Michael Kress. (PHOTO COURTESY LEE MANCHESTER)

with four-year college degrees on Staten Island by 30,000 by the year 2025.

Startling percentage

The overwhelming majority of Staten Islanders, more than 71 percent, don't hold a college degree. Only 136,040 of the borough's 470,728 residents are college graduates with a baccalaureate or higher, according to the latest census data. Those numbers place the borough next to last in the percentage of college-educated residents; only the Bronx has fewer.

"Our goal is to take the social assets that we have on our campuses ... our students, our faculty, our staff, our presidents, and really assist our New York partners in these neighborhoods, starting with the high schools and working down through the whole pipeline, pre-K, elementary, into high school feeders," said Wagner College President Richard Guarasci. Wagner was the host site for a meeting of the consortium on Friday.

James O'Keefe, vice provost of the Staten Island campus of St. John's University, said the borough is uniquely positioned for such a project.

"What we can do in this opportunity is unique. I don't think any other borough in the city could do a project like this," O'Keefe said. "The

largest barrier is even getting them to think about going to college, getting it on their radar screen. What we try to do through this project is to create really good opportunities because we know a rising tide lifts all boats."

College of Staten Island President William Fritz said the consortium hopes to "change the conversation" about the necessity of higher education.

"The 30,000 Degrees program is changing the conversation on Staten Island about the importance of a college degree. It's not just about jobs, but also civic engagement, health, and other quality of life indicators," Fritz said.

Principals Sharon Henry of McKee High School; Tim Gannon of Port Richmond High School; Deirdre DeAngelis of New Dorp High School, and Mark Erlenwein of Staten Island Technical High School, said they are all on-board with the program.

"This type of initiative helps students from many diverse backgrounds, many socio-economic backgrounds," Henry said.

It's about timing

"I think it's about timing. We're evolving as an educational system," DeAngelis said.

Gannon said Port Richmond already has a successful partnership with Wagner College, where Wagner students mentor his students. He credited the consortium.

"There is an energy among the four principals and the college folks that allows us to do this," he said. "I think that's the magic that our kids need, that's the magic that Port Richmond students need."

Hometown spirit

Northfield Bank Foundation President Susan Lamberti, a retired educator and Advance Woman of Achievement, said the borough enjoys a "unique hometown spirit" that is exemplified by the consortium, adding Northfield is "proud to be a sponsor."

"As a former longtime educator on Staten Island, I am fully aware that many Staten Islanders have this culture issue, a kind of diminished family self-image when it concerns higher education, which often hinders young people from pursuing college. There is a need to change that mindset, to nurture the belief in higher aspirations, to encourage educational pursuits, and to inspire the dreams of our developing citizens," she said.