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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2025 YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

*Unite For
Good*

YAKIMA ROTARY VOCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

Vocational training plays a vital role in our workforce by preparing individuals for specific trades and careers. Unlike traditional academic paths, vocational programs focus on real-world applications - whether in healthcare, construction, technology, or the arts – empowering students to enter the job market with confidence and competence.

Vocational scholarships are a powerful catalyst. They remove financial barriers, open doors to opportunity, and affirm the value of skilled trades. Yakima Rotary has been providing vocational scholarships to students for over 30 years. This year after a process that included submitting a written application, letters of recommendation, and a personal interview, the following 24 students have been selected as the 2025 Vocational Scholarship recipients:

Joshua Aman – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Land Surveying & Construction Design and Civil Engineering Technology

Benjamin Burnside – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Substance Use Disorder

Ivan Cardenas – Perry Technical Institute: Welding Technology

Zena Cerda – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Nursing

Kenia Contreras – Perry Technical Institute: Business Technology & Accounting

David Cross – Perry Technical Institute: HVAC & Refrigeration Technology

Chance Cusick – Perry Technical Institute: Instrumentation, Automation & Robotics Technology

Mario Diaz – Perry Technical Institute: Welding Technology

Carson Filkins – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Nursing

Cruz Hernandez – Perry Technical Institute: Welding Technology

Rosalia Herrera Morales – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Radiologic Sciences

Meloney Hicks – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Nursing

Margarito Lopez – Perry Technical Institute: Agricultural & Diesel Equipment Technology

Edgar Moreno – Perry Technical Institute: Automotive Technology

Kaitlyn Morfin – Perry Technical Institute: Welding Technology

Michael Negrete – Perry Technical Institute: Information Technology & Communication Systems

Jimmy Perez Rivera – Perry Technical Institute: HVAC & Refrigeration Technology

David Ramos – Perry Technical Institute: Construction & Carpentry Technology

Rafael Rodriguez – Perry Technical Institute: HVAC & Refrigeration Technology

Alexis Saucedo – Perry Technical Institute: Information Technology & Communication Systems

Maria Silva – Yakima Valley College: Associates of Applied Science in Nursing

Wyatt Tollackson – Perry Technical Institute: Instrumentation, Automation & Robotics Technology

Luis Uribe Reyes – Perry Technical Institute: Information Technology & Communication Systems

James Vera-Ramirez – Perry Technical Institute: Medical Office Administration & Coding

This Thursday, you will have the opportunity to meet each of them, hear some of their stories, and celebrate their hard work and dedication to their chosen fields of study.

FOR THURSDAY'S MEETING

Chronicler – Esther Magasis
Greeters – Tressa Lucas, Josh Shockley
Inspiration – Amy Maib
Sergeant-at-Arms – Steven Gustafson
Program – Mamie Barboza & Celina Sanchez
Attendance – Margaret Filkins

FUTURE PROGRAMS

October 30th – Dr. David Knight, Behind the Numbers:
School Finance & Educational Opportunity

November 6th – Angelena Campobasso, Arts
Washington Tribal Cultural Affairs

November 13th – Command Sgt. Maj. Anton Ruffin,
Veterans Day Program

REVIEW

We were on the road one more time as we traveled to Pacific Northwest University to hear from our very own Dr. Foti Panagakos. The Founding Dean of PNWU's School of Dental Medicine, he shared about their mission, the first class of students to enter the school, and gave us a tour of their new state-of-the-art simulation lab.

The newest dental school in the Pacific Northwest, their mission is the education of primary care dentists. There are dental deserts in the state of Washington. Ten counties have less than 10 dentists; two counties have no dentists at all. 80% of the dentists are located in Seattle, North and South of Seattle, Vancouver, and Spokane. Dentists are considered primary care givers meaning you can see them without a reference or referral. In some areas with a low number of dentists, there are also no health providers of other disciplines as well. If there is someone in a dental chair with diabetes, a dentist needs to understand the medical condition, how they can help support it, and manage the patient as they treat them. PNWU's School of Dental Medicine gives students the opportunity to be on a health sciences campus interacting with medical students and other health care providers developing those additional skill sets.

We heard about the goals for the School of Dental Medicine and how they are achieving those goals: prepare primary care dentists for practice in rural and underserved areas; address workforce issues; creating a unique educational program based upon community partnerships; an accessible and supportive admissions process; engage organized and broader dental community; and responsible innovation in dental education.

With a small class of 36 students, Dr. Panagakos believes in a high touch admission process where a director of student success and engagement meets with every applicant to talk about their credentials. With the application already underway for next year's class, they've received over 800 applications for 36 spots. As Dean of the School of Dental Medicine, he meets one-on-one with them when they visit the campus to talk about the program and answer questions. Local dentists have been very supportive. The Yakima Dental Society holds their monthly meetings on campus. Starting a new program has allowed them to take advantage of innovation. Many schools located on urban campuses struggle to find space to build out. PNWU was able to build how they wanted to teach the educational program and worked with the architects to design the facility.

PNWU's dental program is a 4-year program that results in a Doctorate of Dental Medicine. They are the only program in the coun-

try where students come to the main campus for their first year. At the end of year one, they go to one of three community clinics for years two, three and four and continue their education at those sites. In the fourth year, they also have the opportunity to explore other patient settings for six to eight weeks. The three community clinics are located in Yakima in partnership with Yakima Neighborhood Services, Tacoma in partnership with SeaMar Community Health Centers, and Kennewick in partnership with Yakima Valley Farm Workers. The beautiful part of their model is that PNWU doesn't have to run a dental hospital - the building, staff, and supplies are provided by their partners. It is so innovative and unique that they have received phone calls from other dental schools across the nation.

Student recruitment focuses primarily in Washington and the Northwest. When looking at applicants they consider whether they have experienced living in rural and underserved areas. The class of 2029 started on August 24th; every student has a unique story of how they got to PNWU. The class is made up of 23 females and 13 males. Their average GPA was 3.40; they want them to have a strong academic background while also realizing that they didn't have access to educational resources because of their rural experience. They are from Washington (22), Montana (3), Florida (2), California (2), and one each from UT, ID, CO, TX, OK, AK, and MI. They are a diverse class: Hispanic (15), Native American/Alaska Native (4), Black (6), Asian (2), and White (23). Last year nationally throughout 74 dental schools there were only 6 graduates of Native American descent. PNWU has 4 in their inaugural class. There is a strong representation of students that have had dental experience; 12 are prior dental assistants, 9 are prior dental hygienists. 72% are from or have had experience living in rural and medically underserved communities.

We are so lucky to have PNWU in our community! I loved the tour of their state-of-the-art lab. A special thank you to the team at PNWU for allowing us to visit. What else happened as part of the meeting? Andi Hochleutner served as our greeter and door opener. Rick Pinnell shared an inspirational message highlighting the visions turned to reality of two remarkable individuals in our community, Dr. Lloyd Butler and Dr. Kathleen Ross, to provide higher educational opportunities in our Valley. President Sheri gave a quick shout out to Celisa Hopkins and Michael Moen for the great job they did chairing Operation Harvest. Final results will be coming.

