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\$20,000 to Teen Honored for Excelling Over Hardships

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Michelle Diemer's life has been anything but easy. But this metro area high school student is doing such a terrific job overcoming big adversities that she's getting a major college scholarship for it, a scholarship that 50,000 other U.S. teenagers applied for.

Michelle Diemer has her future in sharp focus. She made it clear in a presentation she gave to the Marketing class at Harmon High School.

"In college, get a degree in business and be successful," says Michelle. "I didn't have much money growing up and I don't want to live paycheck to paycheck."

Michelle grew up as one of five kids in a single parent home. And although her mom tried hard, the family struggled financially for years.

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"At one time we had to live with an aunt because she was more successful," says Michelle. "She could take care of us better."

Things are better now, but the memories of hard times still sting. So Michelle has been driven to excel in school. She's in the top ten of the senior class academically and she's an active student leader and busy community service volunteer.

"I just want to inspire people," says Michelle. "I want to show them no matter what you look like or where you came from, you can be successful if you work hard."

"She doesn't let adversity hold her back," says Raquel Rodriguez, Michelle's academic adviser from the federal TRIO Educational Talent Search Program. With Rodriguez's help, Michelle has been relentless in pursuing scholarships for college.

"She's very proactive about reaching her goals and dreams," says Rodriguez. "She just takes charge and she does it. Nothing gets her down. She's got her fingers in about 10 different pots of scholarships trying to figure out which ones she can get."

Now a national organization named for an author whose rags-to-riches stories of impoverished children were a staple of American literature more than a century ago is honoring Michelle for her impressive triumph over hardships.

"It's really just, I'm thankful, I'm blessed," says Michelle.

The Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans selected Michelle as one of its 100 National High School Scholars for 2010 and awarded her a \$20,000 college scholarship.

"It's really life-changing," says Michelle. "Someone is giving me the chance to get my education and do big things and accomplish my big dreams in life."

It's a very prestigious and sought-after scholarship. More than 50,000 students applied for it.

"Someone saw something very special in Michelle," says Rodriguez. "She's deserving of it because she works hard. Obviously she's come through a lot to get where she is now."

And along with the other Alger Scholars, Michelle also got an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, DC in April where she got one-on-one encouragement from influential business and government leaders and philanthropists.

"They put in our heads how successful we were in that we were going to be in their chairs in a couple of years doing exactly what they were doing for us," says Michelle.

Now Michelle is determined one day to be a benefactor who invests her money in kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, kids like her, and gives them a chance to succeed.

"I always had dreams of giving back," says Michelle. "I didn't know to what extent though. And receiving this honor makes me want to give back more. And whenever the money starts flowing in, just don't forget where I came from. Helping people out there who are going through the same thing I have in life."

Michelle is piling up the scholarship money. Beside the Alger award, she has another \$7200 for next year when she goes to UMKC to study business. Just three other students from Missouri and Kansas are Horatio Alger National Scholars this year. They are Kelsey Guthery and Zoe Lucas, both of Lafayette High School in St. Joseph, MO, and Anthony Chapman of Washington High School in Washington, KS.

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