For Immediate Release

National AIDS Memorial Grove Announces Recipients of 2015 Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship

- $40,000 in scholarships awarded to six young leaders fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, through program sponsored by UnitedHealthcare and Wells Fargo

SAN FRANCISCO (Jan. 13, 2016) – The National AIDS Memorial Grove has awarded six outstanding undergraduate students each with a Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship for their commitment to active roles of public service and leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship, named in honor of AIDS educator, activist and reality television pioneer Pedro Zamora, who passed away more than twenty years ago from an AIDS-related illness, has helped support the education of young people who today are engaged in a variety of HIV-related work in their schools, communities and chosen academic fields. The scholarship program began in 2009 and is funded primarily through grants provided by UnitedHealthcare, Wells Fargo and Project Inform.

This year marks the largest distribution of funds from the program with a total of $40,000 awarded to six undergraduate students, two of whom are two-year scholarship recipients with $5,000 awarded in 2015 & 2016. The six recipients will each receive $5,000 to support their educational goals as they continue to provide much needed leadership and community service in HIV/AIDS public awareness and prevention, public policy, and treatment and support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

“We are pleased to see the growth of the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship and see first-hand how our support is helping the next generation of leaders who are actively engaged in AIDS-related work,” said John Cunningham, executive director of the National AIDS Memorial Grove. “This couldn’t be done without the strong support and funding from UnitedHealthcare, Wells Fargo and Project Inform.”

The scholarships recipients are from six states and include:

Raymond Jackson is working on his associate’s degree in Business Administration at Essex County College in Newark, N.J. Raymond’s goal is to work with the Centers for Disease Control in their Global Health Economics Department, the financial resources to help individuals in third world countries with HIV/AIDS. In addition, he is working as a peer educator at Project (WOW), where he has the opportunity to share his personal story of living with HIV and educate his peers of the importance of protecting themselves.

Adrian Nava is a second-year recipient and third-year student at the University of Denver. He plans on completing his bachelor of arts in International Studies and Sociology. Adrian plans on working in the nonprofit sector, focusing on health and access to health services for LGBT people and people of color. Adrian has worked in the sexual health field for five years and continues to do work around sexual health at state and national levels.

Uzo Okoro is a senior at Brown University in Providence, R.I., majoring in Public Health. Upon graduation, she will attend The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University to pursue her medical degree. Uzo was selected by the nonprofit group Advocates for Youth to be a Youth Ambassador for NYHAAD (National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day) to promote a message of prevention, treatment, care and youth empowerment. She also uses events, forums and social media to amplify the voice of HIV+ survivors. At Brown University, she is a lead coordinator of the Sexual Health Awareness Group (SHAG), where she participates in sexual peer education.
Abdon Orrostieta is a two-year scholarship recipient and junior at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Fla. He volunteers with Latino Salud, a nonprofit community- and minority-based HIV agency that provides HIV rapid testing and linkage services making Ryan White support and other medical services accessible to HIV-positive individuals. He is also a member of the Health Awareness and Prevention Society, which promotes increased awareness and healthy living through education and prevention, and plans to incorporate what he has learned through his involvement with HAPS and Latino Salud into his future professional endeavors.

Shira Smillie is a sophomore at the University of Richmond in Richmond, Va., where she is double-majoring in American Studies and Latin American Latino and Iberian Studies. Her concentration in American Studies focuses on the intersections of identity, poverty, power and privilege in the United States. Shira works at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Nursing on an HIV/STI prevention program for black youth with mental illness.

Manuel Venegas is a two-year scholarship recipient and first-generation Mexican-American college student. Receiving this award will help him finish his undergraduate studies in Latin American & Caribbean Studies with an emphasis on Global Health. His background in public policy, community organizing and mobilization are just some key factors that come into play when he advocates for HIV & AIDS at the community, state and national levels. Manuel, who was also selected by Advocates for Youth to be a Youth Ambassador for NYHAAD, is a third-year student at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he serves on the City of Seattle LGBT Commission and hopes to strengthen his voice as a community advocate, and leverage his perspective as a person openly living with HIV.

“UnitedHealthcare is grateful for the opportunity to continue providing funding and support for this important scholarship program, which is helping students pursue their education and active involvement in AIDS-related careers and community engagement,” said Chanel DeLaney of UnitedHealthcare.

“As a long-term supporter of the National AIDS Memorial Grove, Wells Fargo is impressed with the caliber of students offered scholarships through the Pedro Zamora Scholarship Program,” said Marc Ng, Bay Area Regional Sales & Marketing Manager for Wells Fargo. “They will be excellent ambassadors to continue carrying the torch for Pedro.”

The Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship is open to current high-school seniors and college undergraduate students who have demonstrated an active commitment to fighting AIDS. Applications are accepted during the winter and spring of each year. Interested applicants are asked to write personal statements and an essay detailing their HIV/AIDS-related community service, and provide proof of current academic status.

As part of their application, scholarship recipients must demonstrate an active commitment to HIV/AIDS-related community service. Scholarship recipients are eligible to apply for ongoing educational support connected to both their chosen field of study and related community work, helping support future leaders in the HIV/AIDS arena. Through a reapplication and qualification process, the National AIDS Memorial and its funding partners will have the opportunity to follow these individuals on their path to becoming leaders in the fight against AIDS.

To learn more about the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship and other National AIDS Memorial programs, visit www.aidsmemorial.org or call (415) 765-0497.

About the National AIDS Memorial: The National AIDS Memorial received the honor of being designated the official national AIDS memorial in 1996, in large measure because of the leadership of Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi who helped pass legislation that was signed into law by President Bill Clinton, elevating the Grove to join the company of the nation’s other 43 federally designated memorials. The National AIDS Memorial is located in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park at the corner of Nancy Pelosi Drive and Bowling Green Drives.

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