

12 Children of Exchange Associates Awarded \$40,000 in AREA Scholarships

June 5, 2025 | Arna Yarbrough, AREA Scholarships Director



The National AAFES Retired Employees Association (AREA) Scholarship Program stands as a testament to the organization's dedication to fostering educational opportunities.

Established in 1985 through the philanthropic efforts of its retirees and active associates, the program has provided significant financial assistance, exceeding \$1,027,000, to more than 430 graduating seniors.

The selection process, conducted by the Scholarship Review Board, employs a comprehensive approach, considering academic distinctions, participation in diverse activities, unique talents, letters of recommendation and applicant essays. This rigorous evaluation ensures that scholarships are granted to accomplished and promising individuals, reflecting the National AREA's commitment to empowering the next generation through recognition and financial support.

Below are the 2025 winners.



Sydney Frigillana, daughter of Pete Frigillana, Corporate Communications specialist at HQ, has been awarded a \$5,000 scholarship. Sydney plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin to pursue a biology degree with the goal of becoming a sports therapist.

A recent graduate of Flower Mound High School, Sydney distinguished herself through her academic achievements and extensive extracurricular involvement. She was an active member of the National Honor Society, Science and English Honor Societies and Student Council.

Beyond academics, Sydney was a dedicated athlete, playing on the Flower Mound varsity soccer team and with the Sting ECNL Soccer Club. She also gained valuable experience working as a hostess at a local restaurant.

Sydney's commitment to her community is evident in her volunteer work with programs such as Feed the Hunger and the American Red Cross. She also served as a HOBY State Leadership Seminar Ambassador. Her passion for helping others

was further solidified through volunteering with recreational soccer teams and mentoring younger athletes.

Sydney credits her ability to balance academics, athletics, job and volunteer work with teaching her the importance of time management and resilience.



Leah Chik, daughter of Wendy Yeh, pricing analyst, HQ, has been awarded a \$5,000 scholarship. She plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin to pursue a government degree, with aspirations to a double major in political science and international relations, ultimately becoming a lawyer.

Leah's academic achievements include being an AP Scholar and a National Honor Society member. She is also deeply involved in debate, serving as Varsity Debate Team vice president and practice coordinator, and participating in the Parrish Debates, where she focused on addressing local community inequities.

Her leadership roles extend to being president of Geo Club and president and founder of Girl Up. Additionally, she has participated in mock trials and Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL) services. Leah's compassionate nature is evident through her volunteer work at the Leukemia Lymphoma Society and Buddha's Light International Youth Group, as well as her role as a Dallas Urban Debate Alliance Debate Judge.



Alden Halanes, son of Edelyn Halanes, shift manager, Luke AFB Express, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship. He plans to attend Northern Arizona University to study nursing.

Alden's accomplishments include membership in both the National Technical Honor and National Honor Societies. His leadership roles include serving as president of SkillsUSA, historian for Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) and second chair for trumpet. He has also demonstrated a commitment to service through extensive community service hours, teaching religious education classes, assisting with youth programs at his local library and volunteering as a personal shopper at local food banks.

Alden aspires to become a nurse practitioner, intending to contribute value and service to his community. This scholarship will support him in his career pursuit.



Banks Ryan Buck, son of Michelle Buck, application systems analyst programming manager at HQ, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship.

Banks' achievements highlight his commitment to academics and community service. He has demonstrated a well-rounded character through his involvement in various activities, including church youth leadership, bass fishing and serving as captain for both the varsity basketball and football teams.

With this scholarship, Banks plans to pursue a degree in business finance and accounting at Dallas Baptist University. His dedication to community service is evident through his participation in Thanksgiving meal outreach events, food drives and mentoring younger children in fishing through his church.

Banks aspires to become the CEO of a major company, where he aims to use his leadership to inspire others and drive meaningful change.



Erin McFarland, daughter of U.S. Army Col. (Ret.) Scott McFarland, former Europe/Southwest Asia Region commander, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship for her exceptional achievements.

A dedicated student, Erin is a member of the National Honor Society and has maintained honor roll status every term since her freshman year. Beyond academics, she earned an All-League honorable mention for swimming and was captain of the varsity swimming team. Her commitment to the community is evident through her involvement with the newly formed COAST club, a group focused on environmental understanding.

Demonstrating strong time management skills and a robust work ethic, Erin also balances her studies and extracurriculars with part-time jobs at a local restaurant and kennel. She is set to attend the University of Rhode Island to pursue a degree in elementary education, a field she's already gained experience in through an internship at a local elementary school.

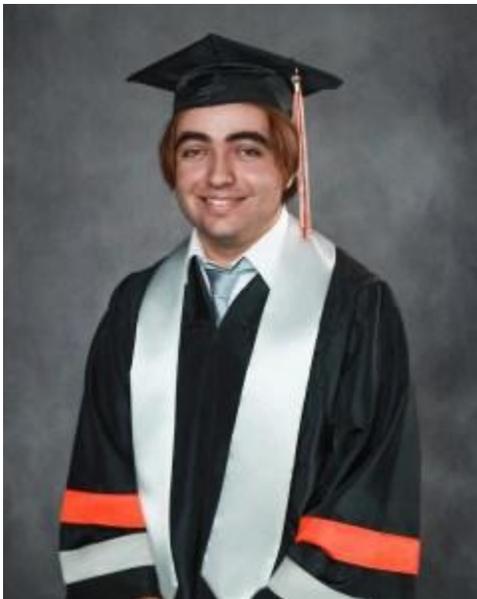


Gabriel Dacuycuy, son of Winston Dacuycuy, a warehouse worker foreman at the West Coast Distribution Center, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship. Gabriel intends to pursue nursing studies at San Joaquin Delta College.

Gabriel's academic record includes being recognized as a Cougar Rising Star for consistently maintaining a 4.0 GPA. His leadership experience includes serving as vice president and resident of the Wellness Club and as treasurer for Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA). He has also been recognized as a Distinguished Member of HOSA and received two HOSA Appreciation Certificates for his service and leadership contributions.

He has accumulated 137 hours of community service and medical training, gaining insight from shadowing at San Joaquin General Hospital and through rotations in the Surgery Clinic and Physical

Therapy.



Kaan Yucel, who works at the Spangdahlem Reel Time Skyline Theater in Spangdahlem, Germany, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship.

This scholarship recognizes Kaan's impressive academic achievements and extracurricular involvement. He has been accepted into the Barrett Honors program at Arizona State University, maintained a 4x Principal Honor Roll status and earned recognition as a College Board AP Scholar with Distinction and Excellence in STEM award.

Beyond academics, Kaan is a well-rounded individual, demonstrated by his involvement as a Student Council general officer, membership in the National Junior Honor Society and co-captaincy of the Robotics club.

Kaan's ambition lies in computer science, with a goal to "connect humans together and unite the world through software innovation." His talent and drive suggest a promising future in the software industry.



Keira Konik, daughter of IT Systems Analyst Robert Konik at HQ, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship.

Keira will attend Navarro College to pursue a degree in cybersecurity, a field where she is already demonstrating exceptional talent. Her academic excellence shines through her OSHA General Industry Certification and her membership in the National Society of High School Scholars.

Beyond her studies, Keira is deeply committed to service. She spearheaded a cybersecurity awareness presentation and demonstration for senior citizens at a local center and actively participated in community luncheons focused on cybersecurity education. Her 13 years in Girl Scouts, culminating as a Daisy Ambassador, highlighted her impressive skills in networking, mentorship, entrepreneurship and money management.

A true leader in technology, Keira initiated Midlothian Heritage High School's first Robotics team, Jagwire Robotics, serving as the team's scouting officer and helping to drive them to the 2024 Houston FIRST State Competitions in only their third year. Her

diverse interests, including guitar and European Equestrian riding, further showcase her well-rounded attributes.

With her steadfast dedication to cybersecurity, Keira is poised to make significant contributions to safeguarding the integrity of complex system networks.



Krist Dela Cruz, son of Mary Joy Dela Cruz, a services business manager at Nellis AFB Exchange, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship. This scholarship recognizes Krist's exceptional dedication and pursuit of excellence in his academic and extracurricular endeavors.

Krist will attend the University of Las Vegas (UNLV) to pursue a degree in criminal justice. His leadership and commitment to community involvement are evident through his participation in numerous student organizations, including the Student Council, Model United Nations and the Asian Student Union Board. Krist gained valuable experience through an internship with the City of Las Vegas, in addition to other volunteer opportunities. His ability to manage multiple challenges with unwavering dedication suggests a promising future.



Marielle Leenders, daughter of Julie Leenders, director, Credit Program Business Development, and the late Hardy Leenders, HQ systems analyst, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship. Marielle, an AP Scholar, will graduate with three scholastic endorsements: arts & humanities, multidisciplinary studies and public service.

Her commitment extends beyond academics, as evidenced by her internship at a local funeral home and a part-time job. She is also an active officer in the Key Club and Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), and volunteers at her community library, as a class mentor at an intermediate school and by providing packages to orphans in Eastern Europe.

Marielle will attend Southern Illinois University to pursue a degree in mortuary science, with aspirations of becoming a mortician or funeral home director.



Sarah Koglin, daughter of Cheri Koglin, Corporate Policy specialist, and Daniel Koglin, retired vice president of hardlines at HQ, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship. She plans to attend the University of Texas at Arlington to pursue a degree in astrophysics.

Sarah's time at Midlothian High School was marked by significant academic and extracurricular achievements. She was actively involved in the National Honor Society and the National Society of High School Scholars, demonstrating her commitment to academic excellence. Her dedication to community service was evident through her active participation in various clubs.

Sarah's well-rounded profile is further highlighted by her involvement in choir and Color Guard, where she served as quartermaster for three years and was part of the Color Guard Leadership team as a 1st and 2nd lieutenant. Beyond school, Sarah's commitment to personal growth is showcased by her 12 years in Girl Scouts and her achievement of a black belt in karate. She also shares her skills as an instructor for both karate and Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Her proactive approach to her future in astrophysics is demonstrated by her visits and interviews with college professors, reflecting her dedication and forward-thinking vision for a promising career in the field.



Colton Griffith, son of David Griffith, Quality Assurance analyst at HQ Dallas, has been awarded a \$3,000 scholarship.

This scholarship is a testament to Colton's dedication and hard work, and it will support his academic journey at the University of Arkansas, where he plans to study marketing.

Colton's achievements include involvement in the National Honor Society and graduating with honors, highlighting his commitment to academic excellence. His diverse abilities are further demonstrated through his active participation in speech and debate, as well as high school basketball. Additionally, his multifaceted involvement in the School Christian Club, Fishing Club and playing multiple instruments showcases a well-rounded individual poised for future success.