

# 5 PCHS grads receive laptops thanks to Rye Brook family

By Jananne Abel

A program that started four years ago at Port Chester High School as Rye Brook resident Alex Drechsler's Bar Mitzvah project has since expanded to four high schools. New Rochelle and Yonkers high schools were added last year and Mamaroneck High School this year.

Called To the Top with Laptops, it provides new state-of-the-art Dell laptop computers and printers to five deserving high school seniors at each school who are on their way to college.

The recipients have shown great strength and perseverance despite hardship in their personal lives.

"The first year they called us cold out of the blue," said Andrea Davis, director of guidance at Port Chester High School. "Alex was having his Bar Mitzvah and this was to be his mitzvah project."

"To our students, this really means a lot," said Davis. "Getting a computer is a big burden, but it's not a luxury anymore, it's a necessity."

"They were so floored by the reaction and feedback they received, so they did it again two years ago. Last year it expanded to Yonkers and New Rochelle."

"They're such a lovely family," said Davis of the Drechslers, Alex, this year a sophomore at Blind Brook High School and his father Robert started the program.

"It's such a personal touch with them presenting the computers," added Davis. The look on the faces of the students is just indescribable."



From left, Rye Brook residents Alex and Robert Drechsler with this year's laptop recipients at the Port Chester High School Awards Night in late May. They are, from left, Diana Polanco, George Soriano, Andrew Calipa, Zuly Guevara and Victoria Avalos

This year's laptop recipients at Port Chester High School were Diana Polanco, George Soriano, Andrew Calipa, Zuly Guevara and Victoria Avalos.

To make the selection, the guidance counselors and a small portion of the scholarship committee get together to think of some students who may not have a computer, are going off to college and getting one would be difficult for them, said Davis.

Students don't know ahead of time they will be receiving the computers, just that they will be getting some type of award at scholarship night, which is held in late May.

To Zuly Guevara, getting the computer "really means a lot to me because many people don't have the opportunity to get one and then I get one," she said. She said she wouldn't have been able to buy one herself.

The package included the computer, printer as well as software – "antivirus", the new Word and everything," she said.

Guevara, who came to Port Chester from Guatemala when she was a year old, had trouble learning English because Spanish was spoken at home.

She went to Kennedy School starting in kindergarten but said she didn't feel fluent in English until middle school. She is heading off to John Jay College in New York City to study criminal justice in the fall as the first in her family to attend college. She wants to become a criminologist – studying crime in society and how people react to it. "It's psychology and sociology together," she said.

Guevara, who will be commuting to school, will use the computer to do her schoolwork and to "e-mail it to the teachers on time, take it to college and use it for class."

Guevara's father is a mechanic, her mother a stay-at-home mom, and she has two younger siblings. George Soriano will also be the first in his family to attend college and is proud that he has achieved this meaningful goal, according to a write-up on the laptop recipients put together by the guidance department. He is going to Manhattan College to study engineering.

Andrew Calipa will be attending Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I., where he plans to pursue a major in graphic design. He hopes to one day open his own graphic design company. Having been raised in a single parent household that has experienced financial

hardships. "Andrew will benefit tremendously from this laptop donation," according to the guidance department synopsis. "He has worked hard throughout his four years at Port Chester High School and is deserving of this special award."

Diana Polanco is described as mature and responsible, working hard in school and long hours at the local movie theater.

"She is a gentle, caring and positive young woman who has earned the respect of faculty and peers," according to the synopsis.

Polanco will attend Iona College in the fall where she plans to pursue a major in pre-medicine.

Victoria Avalos comes from Peru, having arrived four years ago with her mother in search of a better life. She learned English in one year and exited the ESL program. She has maintained a high average in high school and will attend Westchester Community College in the fall to pursue a career in nursing.

So far, the Drechslers have donated 45 laptops and printers at four high schools and plan to keep on giving.