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Sara's Hope ...

Foundation helps 'average' students

By CHRISTINA L. ESPARZA/Staff Writer

VICTORVILLE — Crista Haynes wants to one day be a crime-scene investigator.

The 18-year-old Oak Hills native is attending California State University, Long Beach and majoring in criminal justice.

Paying for school is tough, but thanks to a \$500 scholarship named for her best friend, it got a little easier.

"I wrote an anonymous essay, and they judged it," Haynes said.

Haynes participated in the essay contest to win part of a \$1,500 prize from Sara's Hope Foundation.

The foundation is named after the Serrano High School basketball player and former Miss Victorville, Sara Rojas, who died in a traffic collision last December.

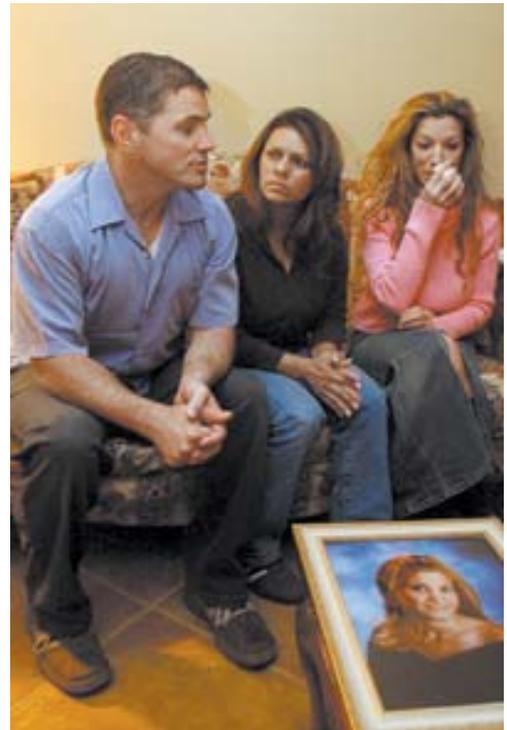
The foundation is designed to encourage youths to reach for their goals, even if they do not have the best grades or athletic ability, according to Rojas' uncle, Dan Tate.

The subject of the essay: It's a wonderful world.

"God gives more through us than to us," Tate said.

Tate said Rojas wasn't the student that hit a 4.5 grade point average, or the star quarterback, but a vivacious and friendly girl with a zest for life.

"The system overlooks them," Tate said of average — but tenacious — students. "There are more kids like Sara out there, and if we reach them, we could be a reason for them to succeed."



Dan Tate, the uncle of Sara Rojas, who died in a traffic accident last year and whose portrait is on the coffee table, talks about Sara's Hope Foundation Sunday with his wife Patti, center, and Kristina Nolan, Sara's mother.

The money comes from a golf tournament Tate and Kristina Nolan, Rojas' mother, hope to hold annually, and donations.

Nolan said at first she felt conflicted when her brother, Tate, approached her to start a foundation in Rojas' name.

"I cry every day; I hurt every day," Nolan said. "But (working with the foundation) does help."

One facet of the foundation is Cinderella's Closet, where donated dresses and shoes are lent to girls so they can go to the high school prom, formals and homecoming.

One of the closet's recipients, 17-year-old Jessica Burnham, picked out a zebra-print gown to wear to homecoming.

"It was wonderful," Burnham said. "It brought me a lot of smiles and made me really happy. It was a special gift from (Nolan), and it was beautiful."

Tate and Nolan also arranged for a hair-stylist to give the girls up-dos.

"It was very hard to see the girls giggling and laughing," Nolan said. "But it was also wonderful because Sara — that's the kind of girl she was."