

THANKS *for* GIVING

by Alisha McGee

November 2016

Right Place, Right Time

Alumnus Awards \$100,000 Scholarships to 19 Seniors

It had been billed as what would be the “greatest night of their senior year,” but they still weren’t sure what was happening.

The 19 seniors stood in a line on stage, shifting their weight and smiling nervously as they waited for the administrator’s speech to conclude. Most of them thought they were there for a photo op and an official announcement about their school renovating the district’s football stadium. It was Election Night, and several of them were anxious to attend a watch party to observe the results of the first Presidential election in which they were able to vote.

They never dreamed they were on stage to accept a gift that would forever change each of their lives.

During a homecoming presentation two months earlier, Henderson High School Distinguished Alumnus Grady Ash impulsively distributed \$100 bills to 17 seniors who were in Ronny Grandgeorge’s calculus class, and to two senior library aides who were also present. At a school board meeting on Election Night, he took it a step further--several steps further--by awarding individual \$100,000 scholarships to each of these students.

“I realized in that moment that my life had just been changed,” Peyton Chenault said. “I knew that the repercussions of what Mrs. Johnson had just said and what had just happened would affect me for the rest of my life.”

H I S D
Superintendent
Keith Boles and
Communications
Coordinator
Stacey Johnson
personally invited
each of the

students to the board meeting, but did not reveal the reason. Johnson presented the scholarships to the students after the board meeting in the administration building’s auditorium.

Not even the students’ parents, who received invitations by mail, knew what was happening. Jean Williams is a school board member and a member of the Education Foundation--which approves scholarships--and even she was clueless about the scholarship her daughter, Joy, was receiving.

“There don’t seem to be any words to adequately describe

how I felt when Mrs. Johnson announced the amount of the scholarship; however, ‘shocked’ does come close,” Jean said. “Reflecting back on that moment, there were a range of emotions... shock, disbelief, gratitude to God and Mr. Ash, shock again, speechless, overwhelmed and certainly thankful.”

Ash is a 1951 HHS graduate. In 1979, he started AG Equipment Company, an organization that designs and builds natural gas compression equipment. Throughout his successful career, Ash has developed a reputation for being generous--sometimes impulsively so. He decided to give these scholarships after receiving thank you notes from the students for the cash he gave them at homecoming.

“After reading their notes and reflecting on their comments, I said to myself, ‘I can do better,’” Ash said. “Then I decided \$100,000 would be just the right amount.”

Each recipient will receive \$25,000 a year for four years to support their expenses at the college or university of their choice. Their only obligation will be to maintain acceptable academic standards with their school.

“It is very satisfying to work hard and be successful in your chosen field of endeavor and perhaps make a lot of money along the way,” Ash said. “But it is equally as satisfying--if not more so--to share the fruits of your labor with others in an impulsive way. Being in the right place at the right time has been the story of my life and I wanted the 19 students who met with me on Sept. 16 to experience this timing for themselves. The students prepared hard in school and showed up -- for a visit with a stranger -- and the rest is history. That’s a good story and I was very pleased and grateful to be a part of it.”



Taylin Antonick, Kaine Campbell, Christina Colley, Peyton Chenault, Bryan Dickerson, Emma Baker, Raini Dorman, Maddie Eby, Aric Fountain, Jodi Isaac, Joy Williams, Hannah Francisco, Jeffery Glasgow, Caitlin Kidd, Jack Kelly, Breanna Milam, Christian Lane, Hannah Perry and Sarah Vaughn were presented with \$100,000 scholarships Nov. 8. *courtesy photo*

The students say that Grandgeorge has taken this experience and used it as a learning opportunity for them. He allowed the class to be present for Ash’s initial presentation in the first place, and then he coordinated their efforts (and allotted class time) to send Ash thank you notes--which spurred Ash’s decision to award the scholarships.

“After having talked with the students about how this changes their lives, I have a greater respect for each of them,” Grandgeorge said. “They shared personal stories about the struggles they were having--prior to the scholarship--to determine how to pay for their education and some of the hardships their families were encountering. I am humbled to hear each of them talk about how appreciative they are of the scholarship and their plans to pay it forward in the future. I look forward to watching these students in the future.”

Each of the students has said that they’ve learned valuable lessons from Ash’s generosity.

“It lit a fire under me,” Jodi Isaac said. “I hope to be as successful as him one day. I want to give back to people like he gave to me. It inspired me to be successful and always strive for more. But even if it isn’t money--just being nice in every way to give back to others.”

These soon-to-be high school graduates never saw this gift coming. It has changed their lives, their plans and their perspectives.

“It is interesting how such a big thing happened in little Henderson, Texas,” Chenault said. “What happened at the meeting blew our expectations out of the water. I really believe that Mr. Ash made a great investment in our lives. I hope to meet his expectations.”

“Being in the right place at the right time has been the story of my life and I wanted the 19 students who met with me on Sept. 16 to experience this timing for themselves.”

--HHS Alumnus Grady Ash

Parental Perspective

“This event reminded me of God’s goodness to me throughout my life. His goodness has been so undeserving, yet He has always given it to me reminding me that He is there and He sees me and my family. I was in shock. I was not expecting anything close to that. I started crying as soon as I witnessed how Bryan reacted to the news. I kept thinking I misheard her, and I had Bryan open the envelope as soon as we got in the car to read the letter. I wanted to see it in writing to make sure I hadn’t imagined it all! It still seems so unreal at times.” --Tasha Fraser, mother of Bryan Dickerson

“This directly affects our family by letting our son go to college without the debt of student loans. Our finances have never been where we could put back for the kids’ college, so he would have had to get loans to be able to attend college. We are still paying for the loans from when we attended college. We were amazed and in shock. I, myself, could not breathe. I was crying like a baby and still cry when I think about the great blessing Mr. Ash granted to our son and, in turn, to our family. We are very grateful and extremely appreciative of his gift.” --Barbara Glasgow, mother of Jeffery Glasgow

In Their Own Words...

All 19 Seniors Share Their Scholarship Reactions; Reveal Their College Plans

“I believe the Lord put me in line to be there. This scholarship wasn’t given to me or any other student because we were better, smarter or more deserving than other kids at HHS, because we aren’t. We were just lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time. If you put your life in the Lord’s hands, He’ll provide when you think all is falling apart.” --Taylin Antonick; college: A & M I major: agribusiness

“God has a plan for everything. God put me where He needed me to be. It inspires me to pay it forward. I can’t just go through my life knowing that someone has been so generous to me and not act on that generosity and be generous myself. I’ve never had anyone believe in me that much.” --Emma Baker; college: SFA I major: nursing

“I left HISD after eighth grade, and came back during the second semester of my junior year. I think everything happens for a reason. I moved off and it just so happened that I came back and it was here for me. With whatever I’m able to do, I want to give it in that way.” --Kaine Campbell; college: UT Tyler I major: pharmacy

“The whole situation reminds me of *Great Expectations*. The main character, Pip, had a benefactor and he could do whatever he wanted to, and yet the choices he made were for the worst in his life. It really hurt him as a person. When I read it, I thought that something like that could never happen in my life. And now, I really don’t want to mess this up. I don’t want to turn out like Pip in the book. I want to pay it forward.” --Peyton Chenault; college: LCU, SMU or Rice; major: software engineering & mathematics

“Your kindness and the way you present yourself to others means something. Always be kind to others because you never know when an opportunity could open from that.” --Christina Colley; college: Northwestern I major: music education

“It opened a door I couldn’t open. It shattered my whole plan of what I thought I was going to do, and opened up so many options. It is nothing short of us praying and God providing.” --Bryan Dickerson; college: SFA I major: kinesiology

“I plan to be a coach, so I won’t be as financially able as Mr. Ash is. But, his actions have taught me to make sure I always instill the values of generosity. The good, Christian values that Coach Castles always talks about, because you never know what those kids are going to end up doing.” --Raini Dorman; college: undecided I major: communications & public relations

“Honestly, I was in shock when I heard it was for \$100,000. I felt like it wasn’t real that someone had given us all \$100,000 and it was ours.” --Maddie Eby; college: TCU I major: finance

“I am finally able to pursue the career I want, to follow my dreams and not be held down by other problems and issues. I will be the first person in my family to go to college. It has given me the push out the door that I needed.” --Aric Fountain; college: Kent State I major: computer programming, game design

“Everyday I’m like, ‘It’s a good day. I don’t have to worry about paying for college.’ I’m more positive now. Definitely happier. I’m not as stressed about my future.” --Hannah Francisco; college: UT Arlington I major: architecture

“A single event can change the entire course of your life. What events led up to me being there? Starting with being in Algebra I in eighth grade. I wouldn’t have been in calculus if I hadn’t been in algebra. If I wasn’t in calculus, I wouldn’t have been in the library that day. If I hadn’t been in the library, I wouldn’t have gotten the scholarship.” --Jeffery Glasgow; college: undecided I major: journalism

“My parents can only pay so much of my college. I’ve been stressing about that. Now, I just don’t have to worry about it. My parents don’t have to worry about it. I’m just happy for my parents because they don’t have to worry about school.” --Jodi Isaac; college: UNT or UTA I major: business

“When I realized that we were getting a scholarship, I got excited. But, when I heard ‘\$100,000,’ it was like a weight I didn’t even know I was carrying was lifted.” --Jack Kelly; college: Notre Dame I major: architecture

“The first thing I thought of was my mom. I looked out and she was crying, and I was happier for her than for myself. It doesn’t feel like I did anything to earn it. It is such an honor.” --Caitlin Kidd; college: maybe TJC I major: undecided (maybe theater or dermatology)

“I’m just very thankful and kind of in awe.” --Christian Lane; college: LeTourneau I major: engineering

“Before the scholarship, my parents didn’t know how they were going to get me to college. When I told them, they started crying. Now I have so many choices.” --Breanna Milam; college: junior college, then LSU I major: English Literature

“I looked out at all the parents, and everyone was crying. It meant so much to them--just as much, if not more. It could’ve happened to anybody, but it happened to me.” --Hannah Perry; college: SFA I major: nursing

“It was always in the back of my head that I was going to struggle to get through college. After I learned that I didn’t have to struggle anymore, no more of that cloud was following me around. It just kind of went away after that. I’m a lot happier.” --Sarah Vaughn; college: UT Dallas I major: interactive design

“Every moment of our lives, God has prepared us for this. Mr. Ash said at Homecoming that no matter what we have--money, a kind word, a smile--we need to give somebody something every day. I’ve definitely thought about that a lot more and tried to put a lot more effort into it.” --Joy Williams; college: undecided I major: finance



Alumnus Grady Ash poses with HHS seniors after gifting them with \$100 each at a Distinguished Alumnus presentation during Homecoming Week in September. *courtesy photo*

He’s Grand: *Students Express Appreciation for Grandgeorge’s Teaching*



“Mr. Grandgeorge needs to be recognized. He could have said that we needed to work that day (at Homecoming). He allowed us to have the opportunity to listen to Mr. Ash. He allowed this to happen.” --Emma Baker

“Without Mr. Grandgeorge, we wouldn’t be in this situation. He is the one who took our class down to listen to Mr. Ash at Homecoming. He was really able to turn the whole situation into a very positive life lesson and motivate us to do great things with our lives. He really is an excellent teacher and mentor.” --Peyton Chenault

“Mr. Grandgeorge has always motivated us and given us life lessons. He talked to us about what to do after high school. He pushed us to further our education. He has been our mentor, and he allowed us to go and speak with Mr. Ash. He made this all happen without even knowing it.” --Aric Fountain

“Mr. Grandgeorge is the one who took time out of class to help us write thank you notes to Mr. Ash.” --Jeffery Glasgow

“Mr. Grandgeorge used the experience to teach us life lessons. He said that Mr. Ash was investing in us, and that we shouldn’t waste it.” --Christian Lane