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Needy scholars aided

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A little-known local nonprofit, the **Peninsula College Fund**, is preparing to welcome 15 newly minted high school graduates into its scholarship and mentoring program on Saturday, even as it celebrates the achievements of five students who've just graduated from **college**.

The **Peninsula College Fund**, founded in 2006, aims to get motivated low-income minority students from East Palo Alto, East Menlo Park and Redwood City through **college**.

To accomplish this, the organization gives the students \$12,000 in scholarships (\$3,000 for each year) - but that's not all. The students also get individual mentors to help them through all four years of **college**, and the program arranges summer internships for many of them.

The program targets needy students who are achieving, but often overlooked by other scholarship programs because their GPAs (usually in the 3.3 to 3.8 range) are good, but not stellar.

"The reality is that these kids are often overlooked because they're a 3.3 or a 3.5 (GPA) kid and the scholarship money's for a star who's a 4.0 or 4.5 kid," said founder Charles Schmuck.

Schmuck, a Menlo Park resident who teaches and coaches at Presentation High School in San Jose, started out by volunteering as a mentor for a similar Southern California program his brother was involved in. A student at that program was going to Cal, and she wasn't the only one the program had sent to the Bay Area. His brother recruited him to help find more mentors for his kids, and Schmuck dutifully held a reception in Woodside.

And then a dentist friend of his posed a question.

"He said, 'Charles, this is great, but why are we doing this for kids in South Central when we have this problem right across the freeway?'" said Schmuck. "My friend's comment just hit me between the eyes. I said, 'You're right.' That's when I went out and started doing research at the local high schools." He began by offering the program at East Palo Alto Academy, Eastside **College** Preparatory School and Menlo-Atherton. Then he and his co-founders started hearing from students who lived in the same areas attending Woodside, Summit Prep and Sequoia high schools, and now those are on the list.

"We get requests every year to expand the program into Carlmont (in Belmont) and other schools in East Palo Alto," he said.

'A major challenge' Many of the scholarship students are the first in their families to go to **college**, said Schmuck, and many of them don't know anyone at their school who will also go to their **college**.

The students "are going through a major challenge," he said. "It's a societal, social change these kids are going to go through." Since the first crop of just three scholars in 2006, seven students have

graduated from **college**, and this Saturday's additions to the program will bring the total to 67 students.

Only one student has left the program - to go into the Air Force, said Schmuck.

Throughout their **college** careers, the **fund** recipients are required to maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA, write to the donors twice a year and remain a student in good standing, with confirmation from a student adviser. They get \$3,000 each year they remain in school.

Selection criteria The students are picked based on educational achievement, student potential, character and individual financial need. Candidates are required to submit an application and essay. Recommendations from both a high school teacher and counselor are required.

Schmuck said they especially look for kids who have a record of service at their school or church or in their community.

Once these kids graduate from **college** and become successful, he then hopes they will become mentors and keep the program going.

The program gave out 18 scholarships to the class of 2010, with those students attending **colleges** ranging from Notre Dame de Namur University to UCLA to Vassar.

The ceremony this Saturday will be held at Sacred Heart Prep in Atherton.

The guest speaker will be Francisco Jimenez, an author and Santa Clara University professor who has written several books about growing up in a family of migrant laborers.

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