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UCM Awards Annual Valencourt Scholarships to Local High School Graduates

Alexandria, VA (July 6, 2017) – United Community Ministries, Inc. (UCM) is pleased to announce its Valencourt Scholarship awards for 2017. Thanks to a generous bequest in 2014, the Lois Valencourt Scholarship Fund enables students who have graduated from high schools in the Mount Vernon area to pursue post-secondary training and career advancement after graduation.

“Education means higher wages over a lifetime and is a key connector to financial independence,” says UCM Executive Director Alison DeCoursey. “We are grateful to Mrs. Valencourt for her commitment to education. Her generous gift continues her legacy and means students and their families can achieve financial independence and self-reliance.” She told the students: “We congratulate you and your families on your accomplishments. As you embark on the next chapter of your educational paths, we wish you continued success.”

Graduating seniors, as well as recent graduates from the previous three years, at Bryant Alternative High School, Mount Vernon High School, and West Potomac High School are eligible to apply for these scholarships. The Valencourt Scholars for 2017 are:

- **Angela Gallegos** is a 2016 graduate of Bryant Alternative High School and was a 2016 Valencourt Scholarship recipient. She will continue her studies at Northern Virginia Community College, where she has maintained a 4.0 GPA while working full time during her first year. “I want to be a positive role model for my son, showing him that with hard work and an education, anything is possible,” she explains. Gallegos is on track to graduate next year with an Associate of Science degree in early childhood development.
- **Zulemy Loza** is a 2017 graduate of West Potomac High School and will pursue a degree in social work or criminology at George Mason University. She is a member of the Fairfax County Police Explorer’s program, where she was promoted to sergeant in 2016. Loza has been a UCM volunteer, stating: “UCM has helped me to learn that developing a connection with the people who you are helping is important.”
- **Keara V. Perez** is a 2017 graduate of West Potomac High School, where she earned a certification as a Clinical Medical Assistant. She plans to pursue a nursing degree at Northern Virginia Community College. In addition to attending high school full time, she also completed a paid internship with Fairfax County Public Schools where she learned information technology and business skills.

- **Ana Villalobos** is a 2017 graduate of West Potomac High School. She will attend Virginia Commonwealth University to pursue her dream to become a dentist. She has been an active volunteer organizing various activities in her community. Villalobos is the first person in her family to graduate high school and attend college.

“Due to many happy years spent living in South America with her husband, Mrs. Valencourt was particularly interested in helping people of Hispanic descent,” says Harry Wood, attorney for the Lois Valencourt estate. “When she returned to the United States and settled in this area, she became involved in and supported many local organizations. Particularly dear to her was UCM and its work to educate and empower families. On her behalf, I congratulate each of the students receiving a scholarship and encourage them to be all that they can be.”

“UCM’s scholarship programs focus on keeping youth and families moving forward so they can create bright futures for themselves, full of opportunity,” says DeCoursey. “Our comprehensive services provide a path to financial independence and self-reliance – including Kindergarten readiness at the UCM Early Learning Center, after-school enrichment activities that foster leadership skills at UCM’s neighborhood community centers, and scholarships that enable career and life success.”

About United Community Ministries

United Community Ministries is a community-based nonprofit offering comprehensive programs and services for vulnerable children, youth, and families in the southeast Fairfax County area of Alexandria, VA. UCM provides a vital connection between people in need and the people committed to helping them thrive. Services include counseling and referrals, emergency assistance, supplemental food, early care and learning, after-school and leadership programs at neighborhood community centers, ELS and citizenship classes, and parent education. Learn more at www.ucmagency.org.

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CAPTION: Pictured at the recent ceremony to present UCM’s 2017 Lois Valencourt Scholarship awards are: (from left) Harry Wood, attorney for Mrs. Valencourt’s estate, and recipient Zulemy Loza, 2017 graduate of West Potomac High School, with her parents. Not pictured are the other scholarship awardees: Angela Gallegos, 2016 graduate of Bryant Alternative High and now a student at Northern Virginia Community College, and Keara V. Perez and Ana Villalobos, both graduating seniors at West Potomac High School.