

Three 2026 Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation Recipients: Their Stories

“I am a Black woman, and with that comes many pros and cons,” wrote Ericka Vann in her 2026 RSF application. For her first two years in high school she attended a primarily white institution, where she “faced small and subtle microaggressions.”

During her sophomore year, however, she toured Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The experience was exhilarating. “I felt like everything changed. Stepping on to a campus that was so full of beautiful Black culture was a shock to me, and I found so much comfort in that.”

For her junior year she transferred to Pittsburg High School (PHS), a “mostly Hispanic and African American school closer to home.” There she was a member of the Black Student Union and volunteer for Pitt Unify to help out with special Olympic competitions. In Fall, Vann will be majoring in animal biology at the California State University, Fullerton

Classmate Loveleen Badham has a different--if no less compelling--story. “What are you?” she remembers being asked in kindergarten. One of her friends answered: “Oh, she’s Indian.” During her formative years she often met racist and cultural stereotypes with some classmates mimicking Indian accents and placing dots on their foreheads.

But in fourth grade, she vividly remembered “the pounding of my heart as I stood in the crowded theater, mesmerized by the rhythm and color of [PHS] Punjabi Pirates, the high school bhangra team performing.” Because the group had shut down for lack of interest by the time she got to PHS, she decided to lead an effort to reinstate it. And reinstate it she did.

As Secretary and later President, she moved her club forward through fundraising events like bake sales and performances at local Pittsburgh schools. The crowning moment came when she served as head choreographer for a bhangra performance the PHS’s Multicultural Assembly. In her spare time she also served on the Youth Advisory Committee for the City of Pittsburgh. This fall, she will be majoring in political science with a prelaw focus at the University of Chicago, where she is getting a “full ride.”

And then there’s Gabriel E. Garcia III, recent graduate of Deer Valley High School (DVHS). Biggest influence in his life? “My Catholic religion passed down to me by my family and Hispanic culture.”

From it he’s learned humility, patience, and service, the latter quite evident in the amount of volunteer work he does for his local parish—substitute choir director, Confirmation teacher, and nine years serving as an acolyte. He has also served as music director for a local gated community's choir program, and at DVHS he has excelled as a musician, was awarded Student of the Year in Jazz Band and given the Outstanding Achievement Award in Orchestra. He also served four years in the DVHS String Orchestra, the last two as Concertmaster.

Little wonder that in addition to an RSF General Scholarship of \$4,000 he also received the Walch/Ledin Instrumental Music Add-on of \$2,500. In Fall, he will be majoring in music and philosophy at Diablo Valley College.

The life stories of these three remarkable students parallel the struggles many RSF scholarship award winners have experienced, struggles that greet RSF Trustees in many of the scholarship applications they read every year. To help support students like these, Rossmoorians are strongly encouraged to contribute to RSF. Contributions can be mailed to Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation, P.O. Box 2056, Walnut Creek, CA 94595, or made online at <https://tinyurl.com/RossmoorRSF> by clicking DONATE.

Submitted by: Wayne W. Wiegand, RSF Trustee

This is the second in a series of four articles on recent RSF scholarship recipients.