



EAST COUNTY

WEDNESDAY, JUN. 10, 2020

Student's volunteerism leads to ODA scholarship

Braden Woods' teen is the 10th recipient of the Taylor Emmons Scholarship.

by: [Liz Ramos](#) | Staff Writer

When Braden Woods' Rebecca Aguilera stepped on the court to face The Out-of-Door Academy as a seventh grader, she was impressed by the Thunder.

"People can be mean when you're going against them, but everybody I've played there is always so nice," said Aguilera, who was representing the Palmetto Charter School.

That impression was one of the reasons Aguilera's family started looking at the school when considering where she would go to high school. Aguilera took a tour of ODA and again was impressed.

But she did have financial concerns — concerns that were brushed away when Aguilera became the 10th recipient of the Taylor Emmons Scholarship, which provides financial assistance for a student to attend ODA.

She was chosen because of her dedication to serving her community and her academic performance.

As a volunteer for the Umbrella Women at Woodland Community Church, she helps make meals for the homeless.

Being a member of the church's student ministry has given her other opportunities to do volunteer work, such as making hundreds of hygiene kits that were given to a homeless shelter.

"Helping people has a place in my heart where every time I do it, it feels so right to be doing it, especially homeless people because it's so unfortunate they don't have a lot," Aguilera said.

Aguilera credits her mother, Crystal, for jump-starting her volunteerism. Aguilera has been volunteering at the church since fourth grade.

"Any time I see my mom [volunteering], it motivates me to be just like her and to help people all around me like she does," she said.

Crystal Aguilera said she might have introduced her daughter to different volunteer opportunities, but it's her daughter's compassion and sensitivity that drives her to volunteer.

"I'm consistently amazed by her," Crystal Aguilera said. "It's my legwork but her initiative and her heart."

Aguilera juggles school, tennis, basketball and her volunteer work all while managing her Crohn's disease. She said managing her disease has made her more mature and able to balance everything. Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease that causes inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract.

"It's easy to pity myself and say: 'Oh, well, I have this disease. I'm going through a lot,' but I don't have to do that because it's all under control," she said.

Although she's unsure if she'll have to start her first year at ODA with e-learning at home rather than in the classroom, she's excited for the opportunity to be a student at the school.

"One person only gets the scholarship each year, so I feel really lucky," Aguilera said. "I'm a little bit nervous. I've never been to a private school, so it's all new, but I think I'll be able to do it."

The Emmons family and past scholarship recipients have connected with Aguilera and talked to her about different classes and teachers. They've also given her advice, which is a comfort to her mom.

"It feels, at least from my mama heart, like she's loved already there," Crystal Aguilera said. "They're good at bringing people in and making them feel welcome. ... She already has a network of people looking out for her."