



Frisco Public Works Director Gary Hartwell and University of Texas at Dallas student Rhegan Johnson.

FOR MILLIONS OF STUDENTS across the United States, attending college is a dream. Undoubtedly, sometimes to achieve this dream, they need a little help.

Four years ago, Rhegan Johnson of Frisco had a dream of attending and graduating from college. Though there was never any doubt she would somehow receive a college education, the means to that end was at times a bit unclear.

When Rhegan needed financial assistance, Frisco Public Works Director Gary Hartwell was there to step in with a \$1,250 scholarship to help her receive an outstanding education at Collin College. Now, Rhegan will graduate from The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) in May with a bachelor's degree in public affairs. It doesn't stop there — the gift that enabled her to achieve her dreams is still giving.

Rhegan's mother, Latrice Johnson, has established the Mary Conner Johnson Memorial Scholarship of \$1,250 to Collin

College to help someone else achieve a dream and a better life through higher education. "The Bible says, 'To whom much is given, much is required,'" said Ms. Johnson. "I'm helping by giving because someone helped my daughter achieve her dreams."

In high school, Rhegan felt limited because she wasn't always able take

transferred."

Her original plan was to attend a four-year university immediately after high school, but conversations with her mother steered her to Collin College. "It didn't make sense to pay thousands upon thousands of dollars for basic classes when she could receive the same, or an even better, education at Collin College for half the cost," Ms. Johnson explained.

Though Collin College has the lowest tuition in the state of Texas, financing an education can still be challenging. For Ms. Johnson, putting Rhegan through college meant working two jobs as well as an additional part-time job in the evenings. She frequently started her work at 7 a.m. and continued until 9 p.m. Her lunch breaks would sometimes consist of showing properties to prospective buyers and then returning to work only to leave for her part-time job later that evening.

"It was crazy trying to juggle multiple jobs," Ms. Johnson said. "But, it was

Paying It Forward

BY HOLLY HARVEY

courses that interested her. However, through the Collin College dual credit program, she enrolled in courses that would be both interesting and would help lead to her future career.

"I really enjoyed the small class size and interacting with professors at Collin College," Rhegan said. "I was able to take specific classes, so I learned a lot of relevant information by the time I



Mr. Hartwell and Rhegan's mother, Latrice (center), exemplify the true meaning of paying it forward.

students who are in similar situations as mine."

Rhegan is now studying for a bachelor's degree in public affairs and will graduate in 2015. She looks forward to working in a field related to public administration, human resources or governmental agencies, and the scholarship that enabled her to achieve her education goes beyond the classroom. Her strength and dedication has led to other opportunities as well. "It's not just about school," Rhegan said. "I am a member of the Power Dancer Team at UTD which allows me to support my school and perform for university events. Without my scholarship, I might not have been able to attend UTD and have this experience."

Mr. Hartwell says helping students goes beyond finances and he tries to help each scholarship recipient by providing guidance. Helping Rhegan was easy, he said.

"Rhegan's very enthusiastic and full of energy," Mr. Hartwell said. "I know she's going to succeed with whatever she sets her mind to."

Helping a student financially to achieve their goals is a duty, he said. "All of us need encouragement and support as we work our way toward a career, and none of us make it without support from others. Donating to Collin College is my way of giving back, helping folks with their education. Seeing Rhegan's mother turn around and help someone else really shows you the value and impact a gift can have."

Even if finances are limited, Ms. Johnson says, "Giving isn't always monetary. Time and resources are also great gifts. I gave because someone helped me, and now I want to be a blessing to someone else and return the favor."

For more information about donating to Collin College, visit the Collin College Foundation website at collin.edu/foundation/.

Holly Harvey is a public relations associate for Collin College.

worth it. Over the course of three years, I never lost sight of my purpose."

The Johnsons received a boost through Gary Hartwell. A Frisco resident for more than 20 years and the director of public works for the City of Frisco, he has donated to deserving students at Collin College for five years, helping single moms and young women attend college.

"I'm a dad with three daughters," Mr. Hartwell said. "When I meet the students who've received scholarships, it makes me say, 'Wow. These young women truly deserve help with their education.'"

Last year at Collin College, nearly 27,000 students applied for scholarships and financial aid and across the U.S., nearly two million students applied for scholarships and financial aid.

"I was so surprised when I received the scholarship from Mr. Hartwell," Rhegan said. "It really showed me there are people out there who care. Giving the money for scholarships to students who are doing their best really can have an impact on education and the world."

Not only did Mr. Hartwell provide a scholarship, but he also formed a mentoring relationship with Rhegan and helped her with career-related pursuits. "One of the best things about helping students is building a connection with

them," he said. "It's always exciting when I get to help a student, even outside of the scholarship. I get the feeling like I'm actively participating in their future."

"Gary has been incredibly kind in helping me start a career," Rhegan said. "He told me when I first met him that if I ever needed anything to give him a call, and so I did. I was looking to get experience at an attorney's office, and he recommended me for an internship at Collin County's teen court."

Now, the future is unlimited for Rhegan. In addition, Ms. Johnson is in better financial footing and giving back what she and Rhegan have received. She has established a scholarship at Collin College in honor of her grandmother, Mary Connor Johnson.

"My grandmother was a school teacher for more than 30 years, and she instilled in me the importance of an education, and that once you have it, it's something that no one can ever take from you," Ms. Johnson said. "She also taught me to always give back. So, staying true to my upbringing, this is one way for me to reach out and help someone in need."

"The scholarship I received helped me out a lot," Rhegan said. "And now, it's awesome for my mom to be able to give back. It's great that she is helping other