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ONLINE AVALANCHE FOR TINY SAN FRANCISCO NONPROFIT The Center for Education Solutions Schooled in the Power of the Internet

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif.—March 1, 2003-- A sleepy little scholarship program provided by The Center for Education Solutions for undergraduate students committed to building communities exploded into a monster last year, thanks entirely to the power of the Internet and The Center's website, www.cesresources.org.

"For several years we averaged about 115 applicants a year," stated Rhett Bratt, president of The Center for Education Solutions. "Two years ago we saw the number fall into the 90s, and then in 2001 we had only 72 applicants." In 2002, interest just seemed to drop off the table. There were virtually no inquiries, and by a February board meeting The Center had only a handful of applicants. The scholarship deadline was April 15, and projections were for 50 applications.

The Center sent a single e-mail in late-February 2002 to FastWeb, an Internet database listing information on over 600,000 scholarships, describing the A. Patrick Charnon Memorial Scholarship program along with a sample application. The Center was soon inundated with applications and inquiries from all round the world.

When the dust had settled on April 15, 2002, The Center had received over 40 boxes of mail, each tightly packed with 200-250 applications and related documents, housed in Bratt's garage. The numbers on the scholarship program were absolutely staggering: over 8,000 applications; about 15,000 pieces of mail; about 9,000 e-mails; over four million website page views; and an estimated \$55,000 spent by applicants on transcripts and postage.

On any given day prior to the final application submittal date, The Center members were bringing home two overnight bags full of mail. On April 15 alone – which happens to be a pretty busy mailing day for the rest of the country as well – over 700 express mail packages arrived, each requiring a signature of receipt.

The Center's website, www.cesresources.org, exceeded its hosting provider's download limit for three months in a row, and by the end of March the total usage was over 13 megabytes.

"For the first time in the ten years of our scholarship, our expenses exceeded our funds raised," said Bratt. "Fortunately we had a small reserve from prior years."

"It was remarkable that with the overwhelming number of applicants, the selection committee had an unusual degree of consensus around the recipient," said Michael Hylton, the board member who manages The Center's website. "What's usually a two-round process was resolved in one, and that enabled us to make the award in the first week of September, as is usually the case."

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The A. Patrick Charnon Memorial Scholarship Recipient

Brenda Dominguez, a junior at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, was the choice. Born to parents in Mexico who were barely literate in Spanish, Dominguez immigrated to the United States when she was 12 years old. Speaking no English, she struggled with her studies in junior high and high school. As her father succumbed to drug and alcohol use, her mother divorced him and left Brenda and her siblings with him. Four years later her father died from a drug overdose. Moving in with relatives in a house with no heat, working for \$2 an hour in a restaurant where she washed dishes by hand, her situation was not very much different than many immigrants to the U.S. And when she was thrown out of her brother's house after getting pregnant in 11th grade, her life became even more unstable. She resolved then to make a better life, and through her senior year of high school she attended a trade school to learn to be a secretary.

Her story of triumph over significant obstacles is inspiring, but she also impressed the selection committee with her history of service to others. After working in an engineering office initially, she has chosen to work for Ogden High School, the Ogden Area Community Action Agency, and now for the Upward Bound program at Weber State University, a program that helps low-income, first-generation students. In each of those organizations, Brenda has participated not just as a secretary to the staff, but as a language interpreter, advisor, and role model to their communities as well. She has volunteered to share her life experiences with the ESL faculty and staff at the Ogden School District to illustrate the issues faced by immigrant students, and she has organized a group of WSU students to volunteer at a homeless shelter. During the Christmas season, she helps low-income families find agencies that can help with gifts for their children, and she helps many non-English speakers in her community fill out job applications, insurance forms, hospital forms, and the like. She acts as an interpreter for non-English speaking families in her community whenever they need her.

Lessons Learned

"There are so many things that stand out about the whole effort. It took a lot out of us, but it's such an affirming thing to do that we're excited about it again this year," said Michael Chapnick, Vice President of Development. "The funniest thing is that Brenda Dominguez's application was number 52, one of the first we received. We could have stopped there."

The Center is currently accepting applications for its 2003-04 award.

About The Center for Education Solutions

Founded in 1991, The Center for Education Solutions is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization devoted to education issues. From its inception, it has administered the A. Patrick Charnon Memorial Scholarship program, an annual award of \$1,500 given to an undergraduate student who has demonstrated the values of compassion, tolerance and respect for all people. The scholarship memorializes Pat Charnon, a particularly generous shoe merchant in Beloit, Wisconsin, who died of cancer in 1987. The Center's website is www.cesresources.org.

About FastWeb

FastWeb, the Internet's leading scholarship search service, helps students make the decisions that shape their lives: choosing a college, paying for college and finding jobs during and after college. Recommended by more than 18,000 guidance counselors and financial aid officers, FastWeb is the most trusted college resource on the Web. Last year, one of three college-bound high school seniors used the site, and more than 20 million students have used FastWeb since its launch in 1995. FastWeb is a division of TMP Worldwide, an S&P 500 company with 8500 employees and more than \$1 billion in annual revenue. FastWeb's website is <http://www.fastweb.com>.