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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gates Millennium Scholarship winner earns degree from Palm Beach State while in high school

Concha Prieto is the second in her family to earn the prestigious scholarship

She is among more than 2,600 graduates who will receive degrees and certificates May 9, including three other Glades Central High School students

(Belle Glade, Fla. — May 2, 2013) When Glades Central High School senior Concha Prieto began taking dual enrollment classes at Palm Beach State College in fall 2010, she was thinking about her family.

If she worked hard to complete her Associate in Arts degree while in high school, she reasoned, and win a Gates Millennium Scholarship like her older sister, she could earn her bachelor's without squeezing her parents financially or being saddled with student loan debt.

With two younger siblings still at home, Prieto said she didn't want to burden her parents, particularly her father, a former migrant worker who works at a sugar mill and is the sole breadwinner. "They worked hard all of their lives. I know they have two other children that they have to take care of. I didn't want them to pay for something that I could have gotten out of the way."

The South Bay resident took a rigorous schedule of college and high school classes and applied for early admission at Palm Beach State last fall. That allowed her to enroll full time to finish her credits. "I had to sacrifice a lot of sleep," she said of juggling college and school coursework. "It was tiring, but I felt good knowing that I was doing good in my classes. I felt that it's worth it."

Prieto, 18, is among more than 2,600 students who will receive degrees and certificates from Palm Beach State College on May 9, including three other dual enrollment students from Glades Central. They are **Nathalie Fleitas**, who has been accepted to Florida International University to study marketing; **Thercy Amilcar**, an aspiring physical therapist who plans to attend either Florida State University or the University of South Florida and **Monica Rodriguez** who has been accepted to Florida Atlantic University and plans to become a teacher. The commencement ceremony will be held at 1 p.m. at the Palm Beach County Convention Center.



Prieto also is among 1,000 students chosen this year for the [Gates Millennium Scholars](#) program administered by the United Negro College Fund; more than 17,000 students applied nationwide, according to a GMS spokeswoman. The good-through-graduation scholarship will cover her expenses to attend USF where she plans to study pharmacy. As a Gates Millennium Scholar, she also will receive leadership development opportunities, mentoring and academic and social support.

“She was an excellent student,” said Palm Beach State Professor Ron Capute, who was her scholarship recommender. “She was mature beyond her years in terms of her studies. She took her schooling seriously.”

Prieto, who is graduating with Presidential Distinction granted to those with a GPA of 3.8 to 4.0, is the second person in her family to earn the Gates Millennium Scholarship. Her sister, Juliana, now a student at the University of Miami, won in 2010 and also completed her associate degree requirements while she was at Glades Central.

“I feel that this scholarship just opens up so many opportunities for you,” Prieto said.

Because of a school district rule, pursuing early admission to Palm Beach State meant that Prieto cannot be valedictorian or salutatorian in her graduation class at Glades Central, but that didn’t bother her.

“I didn’t care about the titles,” she said. “That doesn’t matter to me.” It (receiving the A.A. degree while in high school) is an accomplishment I wanted.”

Her father, Ruben, said he is proud of both of his daughters and will be at commencement with all of his family. Neither he nor his wife has a high school diploma.

“I’m very happy,” he said. “They are good girls.”

Serving 49,000 students annually, Palm Beach State College is the largest institution of higher education in Palm Beach County, providing bachelor’s degrees, associate degrees, professional certificates, career training and lifelong learning. Established in 1933 as Florida’s first public community college, it offers more than 100 programs of study at locations in Lake Worth, Boca Raton, Palm Beach Gardens and Belle Glade.

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Editor’s note: From left to right are:
Thercy Amilcar, Concha Prieto and Nathalie Fleitas. Not pictured is Monica Rodriguez.
Contact College Relations and Marketing for high-resolution photos.

