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Triton College

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Triton College Student Awarded Golden Apple Scholarship, Poised to Graduate Debt-Free



Triton College student Daniela Ramirez, 24, was recently awarded the Golden Apple Scholarship. Ramirez, a first-generation student, will graduate in May with an associate degree in early childhood education.

RIVER GROVE, III. — For Triton College student Daniela Ramirez, the role of educator began at home. As the oldest of three children, and nearly 30 grandchildren, she has been seen by her younger siblings and cousins as a mentor for most of her life.

Math homework, essays, college applications and financial aid — she has tutored them through it all. So it's natural, she presumes, that she should study to become a teacher.

“I’ve been around younger kids my whole life,” she said. “I remember my brothers and I would play teacher growing up, where they were always the students and I was the instructor. That feeling of caring for others just always stuck with me, I guess.”

Ramirez is now less than two months from graduating from Triton College with an associate degree in early childhood education. Last month, she was awarded the Golden Apple Scholarship.

The Golden Apple Scholars Program in Illinois is a teacher preparation and tuition assistance program for students who have the determination to become highly effective teachers in Illinois schools of need. The program prepares aspiring teachers for immediate and lasting success in culturally and geographically diverse teaching environments. Recipients like Ramirez can receive up to \$23,000 in total financial assistance, which includes paid professional development and extensive classroom teaching experience during the summer while enrolled in college.

For Ramirez, receiving the Golden Apple Scholarship means she will be able to pursue a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Northern Illinois University and graduate debt-free.

“I was literally shaking when I found out,” Ramirez said. “I was just so excited that I immediately called my mom. ... It was rewarding to get that news because it has such a big impact on my plans.”

Triton College education faculty member Angela Staunton said she was overjoyed to learn of Ramirez’s achievement.

“Her passion for education shines through both her academic performance and the care she shows in supporting her family members’ success,” Staunton said.

Ramirez joins a growing list of Triton recipients of the Golden Apple Scholarship. Last year, four Trojans earned the award.

“It speaks volumes about the strength of our education program,” Staunton added. “We consistently attract students who are not only academically driven but also deeply committed to making a difference in their communities. The growing number of Triton recipients reflects the quality of instruction, mentorship and support our students receive—and Daniela is a wonderful example of that.”

Graduating college is a major milestone for Ramirez, a first-generation student whose path has been anything but a straight line. Unsure of her future after high school, she weighed the cost of pursuing her dream career and stayed close to her Stone Park home to care for her grandmother while finding her way forward.

Ramirez said these factors led her to Triton College, where she was able to receive an affordable education and maintain a flexible class schedule, allowing her to work full time as a behavioral technician to fund her schooling.

“I started off at another community college, but Triton just made me feel more comfortable,” she said. “There’s so many wonderful people at Triton that I just felt more confident going to class and comfortable approaching a professor or staff member for help.

“I just can’t believe the way my life was when I first moved here, because I was helping out my grandmother with the recent passing of my grandfather, to where I am now — where I’m about to graduate, I’m already accepted at NIU, I got the Golden Apple, and I just feel confident with where I’m going because of what I’ve learned (at Triton),” she said. “It’s just made my dream of becoming a teacher so much more attainable.”

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ABOUT TRITON COLLEGE:

Triton College is a public institution of higher education dedicated to student success. Recently recognized by the Aspen Institute as one of the Top 200 community colleges in the nation, Triton offers more than 130 degree and certificate programs that prepare students to pursue meaningful careers, transfer to four-year universities, and thrive in a global economy. Guided by our mission—*Valuing the individual, educating and serving the community*—Triton serves nearly 17,000 students annually on its 110-acre campus in River Grove, Illinois. Our dedicated faculty and staff provide high-quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities that empower students and strengthens the communities we serve. Triton College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and a member of The Illinois Community College Board. Illinois is home to 45 colleges in 39 community college districts. Learn more at triton.edu.

