David Osorio Found ‘It’ at Berkeley

Story by Tom Hawrylko

David Osorio admits he was lazy. Never on the soccer pitch as a Stallion or a Mustang. And never as a worker. But as a student? Definitely.

“I wasn’t dumb, just lazy,” said Osorio, reflecting on his academic past. Today, the 24 year old who lives with his mother Leonor in Clifton Center has a new approach to education and the opportunities it offers.

Now a student at Berkeley College here in Clifton pursuing an associate’s degree in surgical technology, he was awarded $10,000 in scholarships from the National Board of Surgical Technology & Surgical Assisting and the Accreditation Review Council on Education in Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting. He was selected based on academic achievement, volunteerism, career goals, financial need, instructor recommendations and professional goals.

Officials at Berkeley were so impressed with Osorio winning the awards—and then they learned of his own personal story—that they made him the ‘cover boy’ for their brochure and also included his image on posters, putting him front and center as a model student.

Osorio is thankful for the cash in the award as he pays the tuition at Berkeley. To make that happen and to keep on track for his 2015 graduation, he currently works three jobs.

But it was not always that way for the native of Colombia who will turn 24 Oct. 8, at least not scholastically. “I could always learn, I just didn’t apply myself,” he explained. “I wasn’t ready. I didn’t want to be ready.”

Osorio chose a different path as a teenager. He was a great athlete, certainly a hustler on the soccer field—for the Clifton Stallions traveling program and as a Mustang at CHS where Coach Joe Vespignani named him Defender of the Year for 2008. That was the year the Mustangs made a magical run that ended one game too soon as Clifton (21-4-2) lost 2-0 to Rancocas Valley in the State Group 4 final on Nov. 21, 2008. “Don’t remind me. That loss still hurts,” said Osorio.

But as a student, it just wasn’t happening. School work was never a priority. Looking back, Osorio knew he had no one to blame but himself.

“I finished almost dead last in the Class of ‘09,” he remembered, not so fondly.

After high school, prior to being a student at Berkeley, he attended Bergen Community College. There he also did not apply himself, not really motivated nor focused on a career path. He dropped out and worked.

Then he got his wake up call.

Realizing how hard his mother was working to make ends meet, something clicked with Osorio. “She is my motivation. If I could be 10 percent of the person my mom is, then I’ll be a great guy. Seeing her work has motivated me. I want to make a better life for me and my mom.” Leonor is well known in Clifton as a waitress at La Riviera Trattoria on Piaget Ave.

Following his mother’s lead, Osorio knew first and foremost he would first have to find a way to pay for school to get to that better life. “I work hard to pay for school,” he said.
Berkeley College student David Osorio of Clifton was awarded scholarships from the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting and the Accreditation Review Council on Education in Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting. Osorio is pursuing an Associate’s degree in Surgical Technology at Berkeley College in Clifton. He is pictured on the facing page with his mom Lenore, the person he cites as his role model.

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His three jobs, all in Clifton, include mornings in the office at A1 Construction on Main Ave., afternoons as a peer tutor at Berkeley and weekends as a clerk at Wine Country on Rt. 46 East.

And he is realizing his academic potential as well, with the great opportunity he has been given by Berkeley College. “Studying to be a Surgical Technologist has opened my eyes tremendously to the human body,” Osorio said. “I was fascinated when I started to learn the anatomy and the physiology of the body. I look forward to working as a surgical technologist because it’s an exciting field that allows you to help others.”

“I am honored to get this scholarship,” said Osorio who maintains a 4.0 GPA at Berkeley and is set to graduate next June. With all the area hospitals and medical centers, he expects to find work quickly.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the employment of surgical technologists is projected to grow 30 percent from 2012 to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations.

And while landing that first job in the medical industry sounds great, Osorio has long term goals that include more education. “I see it as a trajectory to becoming a physician’s assistant for a medical doctor.”

Looking back on his days of underachievement as a student, Osorio feels like a different person today, but he did take some fond memories with him.

Despite his early struggles as a high school student, Osorio enjoyed his experience at CHS. Many of the people he met, mainly through athletics, set the building blocks for who he is today and who he will become in the future.

As a Stallion it was coaches Don Knapp and Orlando Ramirez who motivated him to be a great soccer player. At CHS, it was Coach Vespignani.

“I had a good time there,” Osorio said. “I love Clifton. It’s my town.”

But above all his greatest influence has always been and is today, Leonor. “I needed to make it for my mom,” Osorio said. “She is my role model.”

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