

93 Graduating Students Gather to Thank the Schwarzmans

By Dan Pietrafesa
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Emily Chavez was given the opportunity to say thank you and reflect back on a long journey that is coming to a close.

The St. Jean Baptiste High School senior was among the 93 Catholic high school seniors sponsored by Christine and Stephen A. Schwarzman in the Inner-City Scholarship Fund to attend an early graduation celebration at the headquarters of Blackstone Group in Manhattan May 17.

Stephen Schwarzman is the CEO of Blackstone, and the celebration was held at the headquarters of the investment firm for the first time. All 93 seniors are pursuing post-secondary education.

"We've been on this long journey and it's coming to an end. It's hard to believe that it's ending. I really appreciate how attentive and personal (Mr. Schwarzman) is. He's really dedicated to helping people," Emily, a parishioner at St. Luke's in the Bronx who plans to study information technology at Baruch College, told CNY.



Class of 2018 — Christine and Stephen A. Schwarzman, center, welcome 93 Catholic high school seniors they sponsor through the Inner-City Scholarship Fund to Blackstone Group's headquarters in Manhattan for an early graduation celebration May 17. All the seniors the Schwarzmans sponsor will pursue a post-secondary education. The Schwarzmans have been contributors since 2001 to the Inner-City Scholarship Fund, which annually assists more than 8,000 Catholic school students in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island.

The Inner-City Scholarship Fund, started by Cardinal Terence Cooke and a group of executives from many religious backgrounds in 1971, helps more than 8,000 Catholic school students annually in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. Since 2001, the Schwarzmans have committed a total of nearly \$50 million in tuition support to 350 ICSF students each year. Their \$40 million gift launched the ICSF's \$125 million "Kids Are Our Capital" endowment campaign in 2015.

Brief speeches by the Schwarzmans and selected students preceded the students enjoying pizza and Ben & Jerry's ice cream at the graduation celebration. The Schwarzmans circulated to talk and had pictures taken with students in a room on the 43rd floor of the Park Avenue building.

"I wanted to show these students what an office is like," Stephen Schwarzman told CNY.

"I thought it was important. I never had that experience. I didn't get into an office building until I graduated from college.

"This is an easy thing for us to do here. We can round it out with some free pizza and Ben & Jerry's ice cream. I wanted them to all get together to meet each other and I wanted to be able to see them."

Stephen Schwarzman told students to be sure they finished college and work at a job they'll enjoy. "Don't end up doing something you don't like just for money. It's important for you to do something you're proud of, that's sort of joyful and that you're prepared for," he said to the students.

"We take pride in your success and we wish you absolutely the best in your future lives."

La Salle Academy's Daniel Baker and Cathedral High School's Yamilet Andrade were selected to speak to their fellow seniors. Yamilet has received support from the scholarship fund since kindergarten and will pursue a degree in education at Mercy College.

"You have provided so much more than just financial support. When my grades were very low in eighth grade, Mr. Schwarzman wrote me a letter encouraging me to do better," she said in her speech.

"For all of us here, high school was a fresh start with new friends, teachers and challenges. As we all reflect on our high school career, we have become fully emerged in our school career, we have become fully emerged in our school communities. When I reflect back on my education, my high school especially, I know in my heart none of this would have been possible without (the Schwarzmans)."

Daniel was there to thank the Schwarzmans, and also was thankful for what the Catholic education has provided. The salutatorian chose to continue attending La Salle even though he moved to Middletown in his junior year, leaving him with a two-hour commute to the school in lower Manhattan.

"For the past couple of years, I've been writing letters to Mr. and Mrs. Schwarzman and now I finally got to meet them," said Daniel, who will study economics on a full scholarship at Colgate University. "I got to meet kids like me, who shared the same struggles but also have dreams that we want the best for our education."

Gabriel Santiago attended with All Hallows High School classmates, who also were Inner-City scholarship recipients. He will study economics at Fordham University.

"I really do thank (the Schwarzmans) for pushing me through high school and moving me into my college life and the real world," he said.

"Going to a Catholic school really helped me learn how to respect others. The workload prepared me for college. I think I'm going to go through college not easily but smoothly."