

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Four Deserving Sonoma Students
Awarded Full Scholarships to Sonoma State University
through KHR McNeely Family Fund Collaboration with
Sonoma International Film Festival**

Sonoma, CA March 14, 2024 – Four enthusiastic and deserving Sonoma seniors recently got news from the KHR McNeely Family Fund and the Sonoma International Film Festival that positively changed their futures—they were awarded full scholarships to pursue creative arts degrees this fall at Sonoma State University.

Dr. Kevin W. McNeely, chairman of the KHR McNeely Family Fund and SIFF Director Emeritus, and his wife, Rosemary, KHR McNeely Family Fund Vice-President, were inspired to continue their mission-driven support of global projects to enrich the lives of children and further promote the arts.

In collaboration with the Sonoma International Film Festival, Sonoma Valley High School, and Sonoma State University, the four-year scholarships were conceived to inspire the next generation of visual artists and creators and to provide the needed resources to make the dreams of deserving high school students a reality. The 2023 inaugural recipients of the first full SSU scholarships were Sonoma students Jacob Ceron Echeverría and Sakcham (Sam) Mishra.

“Rosemary and I are so proud to support these deserving students, all of whom have a bright future,” said Dr. Kevin W. McNeely. “These scholarships provide the bridge from the Media Arts Program we started through Sonoma International Film Festival in 2002, to provide the needed resources for students to continue their creative arts studies at the university level and to remove barriers to further their successes.”

The 2024 scholarship recipients are:

Hannah Alvarez, a Pivot Charter School senior, received the KHR Family Fund Creative and Performing Arts Scholarship. She plans to put her stage and performing arts background toward becoming a teacher to help children find their voice and confidence in the early years of their development.

Isaac Calderon, a Sonoma Valley High School senior, received the KHR Family Fund Creative and Performing Arts Scholarship. Her talents include fine arts, performing arts, music, and photography with plans to become a visual artist in painting, drawing, and mixed media.

Richie Cross, a Sonoma Valley High School senior, was awarded the Cinematic Arts & Technology Scholarship. A cinematographer, photographer, and short filmmaker, he plans to become a filmmaker. His 2023 student film *Obedience* won Best Picture at the SVHS Media Arts Program Showcase.

Adriel Velázquez, a Sonoma Valley High School Senior, was also awarded the Cinematic Arts & Technology Scholarship. A prolific short filmmaker, screenwriter, director, and producer his Batman parody, *Bad Knight In Gotham*, demonstrates his ability to take a project from inception to completion. He plans to be a filmmaker.

The Sonoma International Film Festival has supported the Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts program for over two decades by providing media lab equipment, internships, and sustaining funding. The program has graduated hundreds of students, some actively working within the industry. The program was spearheaded in 2002 by Dr. Kevin W. McNeely, SIFF Director Emeritus, and Ginny Krieger, SIFF Executive Director, and has been taught by Peter Hansen since its inception.

“The McNeely’s devotion to expanding and enriching the lives of Sonoma students is demonstrated by the hundreds of students who’ve had the chance to explore their creativity and graduated through the program over the years,” said Ginny Krieger, SIFF Executive Director.

About Sonoma International Film Festival

The 27th annual Sonoma International Film Festival is March 20-24, 2024. The Sonoma International Film Festival is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to promoting the best in independent film and filmmakers from around the world, inspiring savvy film lovers, and introducing the power of filmmaking to student filmmakers. Blending a program of international film, food, wine, and fun, SIFF hosts its annual festival each March, and year-round events and special screenings. Ginny Krieger is the Executive Director, Carl Spence is the Artistic Director, and Dr. Kevin W. McNeely is the Director Emeritus. For festival passes, tickets, and more information, visit sonomafilmfest.org.

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