



BRILLANTES CAMINANTES

GUANAJUATO

Supporting the Future Through Education

Newsletter

September 2021

IT'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL SEASON (KINDA)

The new school year has begun, and while Mexico has made significant strides in fighting the coronavirus, normalcy is still elusive. Whether students attend classes in person, remotely via video conferencing or a combination of both is dependent upon a single truth: Are classrooms sufficiently large and well-ventilated to ensure students' safety?

Whereas most lecture-based courses continue to be conducted online, science labs and a few other classes are being held on campus and in-person, albeit with flexible scheduling and minimized student densities.

All of our students have recently become eligible to receive a Covid vaccine. While not mandated by their universities, school administrators believe a return to the classroom is dependent upon all students, faculty and staff being vaccinated. A re-evaluation of classroom protocols will likely occur after Christmas, to see if any restrictions can be loosened.



Even with all these challenges, our students are thriving academically, and we enthusiastically applaud their grit and determination.

In other news, after an exhaustive application- and interview-process spearheaded by Anna Adams, *Brillantes* has awarded seven new scholarships to very deserving students. Initial meetings between students and the selection committee were administered virtually whereas final interviews were conducted in each student's home, allowing decision makers to speak with students and family members (masked) face-to-face. Needless to say, we are extremely proud of each and every one of our new students.

Equally deserving are our five recent graduates who head out into the world with confidence and learned wisdom. We wish them all the very best and know they will make positive, transformational changes not only in their communities but to the lives of their families as well. ¡Salúd!

MEET OUR SEVEN NEW SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



Daniel (Dani) Mohamed Garcia Gutiérrez

Public Accounting
University of León

Mentor: Orapan Footrakoon

Dani Garcia attends the University of León and is in his second year studying public accounting—a career he chose with the support and inspiration of his boss at the roasted chicken restaurant where he worked to help out his family. He says of himself, “I’m not easily intimidated by the obstacles that life presents. On the contrary I try to take everything bad to push me to get ahead. I’m a person with lots of dreams and with many aspirations and desires”—including getting a master’s degree and finding work far from Guanajuato, working in fiscal or government accounting. He also sees himself one day becoming a member of the guild of accountants and eventually part of the board of directors.



Diana María Patlán Murillo

Architecture
University of Guanajuato

Mentor: Jeff Tashman

Diana Patlán is finishing her second semester studying architecture at the University of Guanajuato. Of her future, she says, “One of my long-term goals since middle school is to know Italy, and if it is possible to live there. It’s a place with great architectural wealth and I don’t want to only experience it in photographs.” She also has an interest in *danzón*, enjoys anime, and started an online business selling *amigurumis*—Japanese inspired dolls that she crochets. She is committed to doing “everything possible to be a better person every day, in order to leave a positive mark on the planet.” She sees her future as “an immense sea of possibilities.”



Gabriela (Gaby) Arredondo Preciado

Primary Education
Escuela Normal

Mentor: AJ Buckingham

Gaby Arredondo is enrolled in her second year studying primary education at the University of Guanajuato’s *Escuela Normal*. She aims to teach children and young people to pursue their purpose in life and sees her role as encompassing “not only academic knowledge but also skills in the area of psychology, first aid, speaking in front of the public, group control, empathy, but above all ethics and love for the profession.” She has studied English for many years, is now learning French, and participates in many conversation groups that have connected her to people all over Mexico and in other parts of the world. In the future, she also hopes to obtain a translation diploma from the University of Guanajuato.



Martín Esaú Honesto Pacheco

Quality and Productivity Administration
University of Guanajuato

Mentor: Rich Eidenschink

Martín Honesto is studying quality and productivity administration at the University of Guanajuato, where he is in his second year. His choice of career is based on the many new businesses in the state of Guanajuato that present diverse options for work in the chosen field. Outside of his coursework, he enjoys spending time with and learning from his grandparents, becoming more of a reader, and focusing on exercise and nutrition. Interests include soccer, basketball, baseball, archery, Greco-Roman wrestling, swimming, and chess. He says, "I may not be an expert on any of them, but I understand them well." Finally, "I also always honor my last name - I consider that to be my greatest quality."



Paloma del Rocio Becerra Zarate

Industrial Food Engineering
State Technological Institute of Guanajuato

Mentor: Jan Herrin

Paloma Becerra is enrolled at the State Technological Institute of Guanajuato, where she is in her second year of studying industrial food engineering. She says, "Life has taught me that whatever happens I must fight for what I want." When her first effort to be admitted to university in 2019 failed, her family urged her to not give up on her dreams: with their encouragement and support, she studied on her own and passed the entrance exam in 2020. In ten years, she envisions running her own laboratory, improving the food we consume every day, preventing disease through the development of nutraceuticals, establishing innovative production methods, doing great research, and contributing to the planet.



Rene Gregorio Sánchez Balderrama

Architecture
University of Guanajuato

Mentor: Leonor Parra

Rene Sánchez is in his second year of studying architecture at the University of Guanajuato. He looks back on his prepa experience as formative—awakening in him a love of drawing, sculpture, photography, music, mathematics, science, and architecture. Choosing architecture enables him to combine his interest in the visual arts with design, mathematics and physics. After researching contemporary architects and their work, he says, "One of my personal goals is to travel and know [their work], national and international. I have always liked the idea of knowing the world and more now with this architectural criterion that I am developing." He looks forward to being part of the architectural future of the country.



Reyna Caudillo Ortega

Architecture

University of Guanajuato

Mentors: Alisa Cook & Phyllis Cavanaugh

Reyna Caudillo is also in her second year studying architecture at the University of Guanajuato. Originally from Mexico City, her family moved to Guanajuato for economic opportunity and to be closer to other family members—a change to a more rural life that she has fully adapted to. While she has always been interested and talented in art and music, she recognized the lack of opportunity in those

fields. She says, “Architecture is an art, but also encompasses many other areas of knowledge. That is why it caught my attention and currently I do not regret it.” Her goal is “to finish my studies and be a great architect that helps improve people's lives, without harming the environment.”

SUNDAY IN THE GARDEN WITH BRILLANTES CAMINANTES



Anna Adams, Alfredo Aguilar and Karen Robinson

Before a Sunday afternoon concert in June, the Casa Museo Gene Byron graciously allowed us to take a few minutes to promote BC. Anna Adams first talked about our mission and program and then introduced Alfredo Aguilar, one of our past students who is now making his way in the world. His comments:

“I graduated from university and from Brillantes Caminantes four years ago. After studying industrial engineering, I now work in the process integration department of a Chinese company called Huang-Yu.

Today, I want to thank Brillantes Caminantes for the support that it gave me—not only the economic support throughout my career, but also the support in personal development. Each

month there were different activities, from talks about psychology to museum visits. I even discovered a facet of myself that I didn't know I could do—acting. Every year it was an honor to participate in the Pastorela. It was lots of fun and helped reinforce friendships with other students.

Another side was the wonderful support I got from my tutor and mentor Karen Robinson. We met every Saturday for approximately three years, and the relationship became a friendship. After finishing my degree, we have continued to meet from time to time.

I want to tell the students who are currently receiving scholarships to take advantage of the support that this group gives them. The people who support Brillantes Caminantes are wonderful people. Some come from another country to support ours, which for me is a great act of kindness.”

After the concert, BC members chatted with concertgoers and made connections with a few people who came forward with creative ideas for future fundraising efforts and student activities.

JULY COCKTAIL PARTY FOR OUR MENTORS

The mentors of new, current and graduating students attended a festive cocktail party at founding member Anna Adams' home on July 30. Throughout the year, our mentors spend countless hours with our students, helping them navigate the complexities of home and university life (especially in these times of Covid). In appreciation of all of our mentors' hard work, *Brillantes* sponsored this celebratory get together, replete with delicious food and drink.



Anna Adams
and AJ Buckingham



Gustavo Garcia
and Juan José Prado



Orapan Footrakoon,
Leonor Parra and Xóchitl Tortolero

With almost forty people in attendance, new mentors were able to solicit invaluable advice from our current advisors and form alliances should help be needed in the future.

FIRST-AND SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS MEET AT THE GENE BYRON MUSEUM



First- and second-year students, their mentors and the board of directors gathered on August 7

Since the onset of the pandemic, our monthly, in-person student meetings have been cancelled. Opting for safety, we transitioned from physical get-togethers to virtual gatherings.

As effective as these Zoom meetings can be, our first- and second-year students have never had the opportunity to meet one another face-to-face.

That changed on August 7, two days prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year.

Taking advantage of a lovely summer afternoon, our scholars and their mentors gathered together in the outdoor courtyard at the Gene Byron Museum in Marfíl. After introductions and a quick business meeting, the students socialized and began creating relationships with one another, their mentors, and the *Brillantes* board of directors.

While we have no timeline of when we can safely reconvene our monthly, indoor student meetings, everyone enjoyed and benefited from this late-summer diversion.



Edwin Rodriguez and mentor Cathy Lehman



Mentor Anna Adams and Vale Vianney



Mentor Leonor Parra and Rene Sanchez



Mentor Orapan Footrakoon and Dani Garcia

ODETT IBARA MARTÍNEZ ASSISTS CRIME VICTIMS



Rosemarie Conde and Odett meet twice weekly for English lessons

Jessica Odett Ibarra Martínez, fourth year law student at the University of Guanajuato, thrives on being busy. During the last school year and the summer of 2021, she did her professional service through Poder Judicial (judicial branch) working with a judge at the prison in Puentecillas. Her focus was on an evolving program called “Siempre a Tu Lado” (Always at Your Side). Its focus is helping crime victims. Odett worked with other institutions in Guanajuato to provide needed services for victims and their families, such as finding employment and family therapy. Odett also worked on new alternatives to prison for minor offenses. Her service was nearly full time while she maintained an excellent grade point average.

Odett’s social service helped her realize that she wanted to work in criminal law. To that end, she did her professional service full time with the same judge during summer 2021. She told the judge that she was unable to work as many hours as he wanted because she needed to work.

The judge was so impressed with her social service that he arranged for her to be paid. She will continue to have paid work this fall as she continues her studies online. Odett is so serious about her commitment that she arranged to move from her family’s home to live with her aunt who lives so much closer to the prison. While studying and doing her service work, Odett has made time to meet with volunteer Rosemarie Conde twice a week to improve her

English. She has had great success. While studying for final exams, she also somehow found time to train for and serve as a poll worker for the June 6 elections.

Odett finds it rewarding to work with both victims and criminal defendants. She likes the human contact and the steady and fast pace of the criminal process. She believes that her work will have an impact beyond one person. No doubt it will.

OUR 2021 GRADUATES EXPRESS THEIR THANKS AND SAY GOOD-BYE



Brenda Yaquelin Aguilar Ortega

Nursing and Obstetrics
University of Guanajuato

Mentor: Sunday Sommers

“How many times did I think that one day I would leave? And today I understood that no matter how far away the day seems, everything has an end—just as in fairy tales.

After five years of being part of the *Brillantes Caminantes* family, it’s time to close my cycle as a student—although I’m not saying good-bye. I will be here to offer my support in whatever you need. I thank you infinitely for all the support you’ve given me.

Without a doubt you made the university journey less complex.

I remember when I heard about *Brillantes Caminantes*, and I still remember the selection process and the great happiness I felt when I became part of the association. I’ll always be grateful for the support—not only financial, but also the professional and personal support. The annual *Pastorelas* were a window for meeting new people, making friends, discovering talents, and overcoming sorrows and fears. It was my good fortune to participate in them.

From this great family, both *Brillantes Caminantes* members and students, I take the best of you. Your commitment to each of us and to my colleagues gave us the impetus in the search to achieve our dreams. Everyone has been fundamental in my formation. It’s been a complicated year with the pandemic, but despite all, you didn’t leave me alone on the road. I thank you so much. I really hope that very soon we can meet again personally.

I’m grateful to Sunday, my dear tutor, as well as to her husband David. Despite the distance and the language difference, in addition to the short time we met, Sunday was always attentive. She helped, advised, and always received me with open arms. They are without a doubt wonderful people whom I will carry my heart forever.

I want to be able to see you all very soon and I hope you are very well. Now, I start my degree procedures, but I put myself at your disposal to help with anything you might need. Again, infinite thanks to each of the members and collaborators of *Brillantes Caminantes*.”



Diana Martina Hernández Lara

Mechatronic Engineering
Technical University of León

Mentor: Dianne Romaine

“My name is Diana Martina Hernández Lara—a mechatronic engineering graduate, but an entrepreneur at heart.

I want to extend these words to give my thanks and bid my farewell to this great family—*Brillantes Caminantes*. I learned many things in the meetings that they prepared for us. From the beginning, *Brillantes Caminantes* pointed me toward whatever little or big success that I have had in the course of my career and life. They were always concerned about the problems we might encounter within the university. Whether economic, social, psychological or health-related—they were always there to help in any way.

I was very nervous during my first student meeting, but as the months went by, everyone started to become friendlier. I won't forget the *Pastorela*, which is truly one of the best projects that BC has.

I also want to thank my mentor, Dianne Romain. She was always aware of what was going on in the university, and especially with me. She came to a presentation that I did, which allowed me to share more of what my program was about. I also shared with her all the projects that I was doing.

I am leaving very happy—more than that, excited and satisfied. I gave my best to the association and they also gave their best during my preparation and studies. I am leaving with some friends and very beautiful memories. If I hadn't been part of BC, never in my most hopeful dreams would I have managed to do a university degree.

It is not a goodbye; rather, it's a see you later...

A warm hug to everyone who took the time to get to know me.

Success is the sum of small efforts that are repeated every day.”



Leticia (Leti) Chia Rios

Preschool Education
Benemérita y Centenaria Escuela Normal Oficial de Guanajuato

Mentor: Paty Chavez

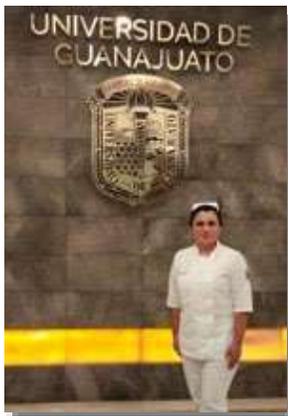
“For me, one of the most sincere and valuable feelings that we can have and share throughout life is gratitude. For this reason, with all my heart, I begin this farewell text by thanking *Brillantes Caminantes* for giving me the opportunity to be part of their group of students and thus achieve my goal of being a Bachelor of Preschool Education.

I still remember the day when the director of SABES Santa Teresa invited me to write a biographical sketch to be part of B.C. I remember that I wrote it with great emotion and enthusiasm. Later, finding out that they had agreed to support me was among the best news I have ever received.

In this group, I witnessed that help and selfless friendship exist. I received all kinds of support in the different stages of my professional training. I also met extraordinary people who shared their learning with me and I made great friends with whom I experienced different ways of seeing life and shared very pleasant moments.

Although my journey was not entirely easy, because the life of a student is not easy, I can say at the end of my training that everything we want can come true. In my case, it was quite a challenge to divide my time, my resources and my energy between the school, my family and my personal life. However, my desire to improve myself and dedicate myself to what I like the most, as well as the strength, encouragement and support given by those who were close to me--all played a crucial part in achieving my goal.

I warmly thank *Brillantes Caminantes* for all the support, solidarity and friendship provided during this process. To Anna, Paty, Lee, Nina, Jeff, David, Jorge, Cathy and all the collaborators and colleagues, infinite thanks for allowing the dreams and goals of so many young people to be fulfilled. I carry you all forever in my heart and I will remember you with much affection, respect and gratitude.”



Maribel (Mary) Ortega

Nursing and Obstetrics
University of Guanajuato

Mentor: Silvia Salas

“I have completed my academic preparation. Five years have passed since I entered university with the hope of one day being able to conclude this stage of my life—one of the greatest challenges that some of us dare to try. So few of us manage to achieve it—a dream that drives us day by day as we carry on, despite adversity.

It’s been five years of knowing *Brillantes Caminantes* — an association of wonderful people who have the sole objective of supporting young people with a great desire to improve themselves in life. They provide economic resources and they also accompany us throughout our university careers with bio-psycho-social support. We also have the opportunity to meet colleagues and friends from different professions, and month after month, we share our personal experiences and achievements.

In each of the meetings we learned something new--from the book reports given by students, from the people invited to give us talks on different topics, and from the opportunity at the end of each meeting to talk with other students and to the members while enjoying delicious appetizers. And what can I say about the *Pastorela* fundraisers? I enjoyed them a lot. There was no lack of laughter in the rehearsals, with the opportunity to take different acting roles each year. All our works were a success thanks to the best theater teacher, Juan José Prado, who supported us at all times.

Thank you all, but especially my tutor Silvia who accompanied me, listened at all times, and was always there for me. Thank you for your unconditional support. I thank God for putting people like you in my path.

Today I can only express my sincere gratitude to this great family. Thanks to them I was able to finish my university degree and fulfill my dream of being a nurse. I assure you that I will strive to be better every day.

Thank you all very much.”



Ofelia González Cabrera

Administration

Instituto Universitario del Centro de México

Mentor: Jeff Tashman

“My name is Ofelia and I want to share with you a bit of my experience with *Brillantes Caminantes*.

I got to know this organization a few years ago, when the members held meetings in a café where I worked. It had been a few years since I had finished *prepa* and I had struggled to find a university that would allow me to continue working and studying.

By 2018, I was working and studying in university, but it was difficult to cover the monthly fees. It was the only option, however, because this university allowed me continue working and in this way cover personal and family needs. A *Brillantes Caminantes* member knew my situation and suggested that I apply to be part of this organization. When they told me that I had been selected to be a scholarship student, I felt great emotion. I would no longer have to worry about paying the monthly fees, since they were perfectly covered by the scholarship.

I started attending student meetings in August of that same year. At first it was strange because I didn't know the other students. Besides that, most of us looked introverted, but I knew several of the members, so that made me feel better. I liked attending the meetings every month. They always welcomed us with joy and kindness. There were also interesting topics presented, and students shared about their projects or important things in which they participated. I never shared, but it wasn't because I didn't want to. Universities are different, and mine doesn't have opportunities to participate in projects and exchanges, so I never had anything outstanding or important to say. For all those students who can and their universities allow them, DO IT! Enjoy your time as students, and be part of everything that can provide you with learning, experiences, and challenges.

I really enjoyed the occasions when my fellow students reported on the novels which they received from *Brillantes*. I had the opportunity to participate in the *Pastorela* that takes place in December for fundraising: everything was great fun and the students got to interact and get to know each other a little more.

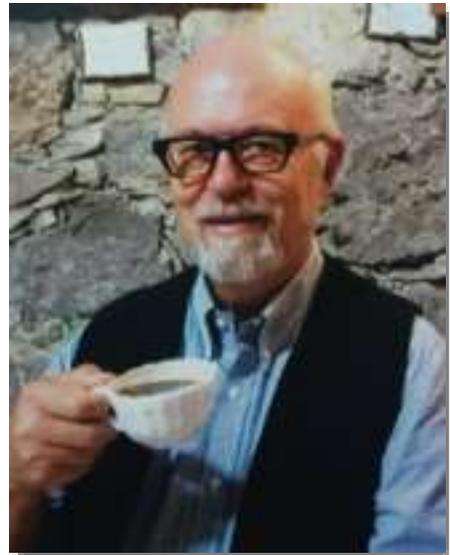
Brillantes Caminantes does work worthy of admiration. I feel fortunate to have been part of it. Thanks to its support, some of us have been able to continue and finish our studies—something that might not have been possible due to the current situation in which we find ourselves. I don't know any other organization that is dedicated to supporting young people in this way. *Brillantes Caminantes* is always aware of each one of us in all areas of our life and ready to help us when we need it.

I finished my studies in December 2020. I wanted to graduate *por excelencia*, which required a GPA of 9.5 (and would have fulfilled all graduation requirements). Sadly, my GPA was 9.4, so I had to choose another form of qualification for graduation. I chose to take a diploma, and as always, *Brillantes Caminantes* was there to support me. In January I requested my university certificate and I am currently awaiting its delivery to continue with the degree process.

I invite my colleagues not to forget *Brillantes Caminantes*. Even when we are no longer scholarship students and we've finished our studies and achieved our goals, hopefully we will not forget the support we've received. There are more generations of students to come who will have the same needs we did. I hope we'll take the opportunity to support them in one way or another with what we can, so that this organization continues and is able to support kids who, like us, also have dreams and goals to achieve.”

IN MEMORIAM: STEVE KVERNSTOEN

Brillantes Caminantes friend and supporter Steve Kvernstoen died this past February from brain cancer. When he moved to Guanajuato from Minneapolis with his wife, Orapan Footrakoon, he brought his library, his wine cellar, his viola, his guitar-making tools, and his generous, easy-going personality. He left behind many music-making friends in the Twin Cities: this past summer, many of them chose to memorialize Steve through donations to *Brillantes Caminantes* in his name. We are grateful for their support.



Our Board of Directors

- A.J. Buckingham, President
- David Spencer, Vice President
- Anna Adams, Secretary
- Jorge Castelazo, Treasurer
- Ingrid Barradas Bribiesca, Coordinator of Student Affairs

Thanks!

- To the students, graduates and mentors who contributed to this issue of the newsletter.
- To writers: AJ Buckingham, Nina Johnson, Anna Adams and Rob Fleming

Editor: Rob Fleming

Design: Agota Page

We hope you enjoyed reading this issue of our newsletter, but if you don't want to receive it in the future, e-mail brillantescaminantes@gmail.com to unsubscribe.

Click here for our [Annual Report](#), which can also be found on our [newly-designed website](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

- We never commit to new students until we know that we will have the required funding to support them for the duration of their academic careers.
- You can pledge to be a long-term donor, helping us ensure that we have a continuous and reliable source of funds.
- Full sponsorship of a student costs \$6000 USD or \$1,200 USD for five years; half sponsorship costs \$3000 USD, or \$600 USD for five years
- Donations of any amount and duration are, of course, welcome.

More information on donating and making an ongoing pledge at

<https://www.brillantescaminantesgto.org/donate>

WHEN YOU SHOP, AMAZON GIVES!

Sign up for Amazon Smile and BC will receive 0.5% of your eligible Amazon (U.S. only) purchases. To sign up, log onto [AMAZONSMILE](#), search charities for “Brillantes Caminantes AC” and select it. Donations will begin with your first order. For complete details about the Amazon Smile program, [CLICK HERE](#)

