

First IMPACT Early College High School class to graduate

When IMPACT Early College High School opened its doors on the Lee College campus, no one was sure exactly what to expect — not even the Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District (GCCISD) eighth-graders who applied for admission, intrigued by the opportunity to earn a high-school diploma and two years of college credit simultaneously.

Four years later, those first students are now IMPACT seniors preparing for graduation. In addition to their diplomas, about half of the 89 members of the class of 2014 will also receive associate degrees Saturday, May 10, at Lee College commencement in the Sports Arena.

“This is our home. We built this. We were the pioneers,” said Azalia Sprecher, a senior who has earned three associate degrees from Lee College while attending IMPACT, which is operated by the GCCISD and currently located in the college Advanced Technology Center. “We hope that we’ve done enough to pass the baton to the underclassmen.”

IMPACT principal Jacquelyn Narro certainly thinks so, noting the seniors are largely self-motivated and dedicated students who have proven their ability to accomplish lofty goals. Reaching this milestone with the first graduating class speaks to the student-centered commitment shared by Goose Creek and Lee College, she said.

“They leave having had a true college experience, so that the university setting will not be a novelty to them,” Narro said. “They are also now more workforce-ready and eligible for higher-paying jobs than the average high-school graduate. It changes their earning potential and all the possibilities for their future.”

Moving forward, Narro plans to continue building enrollment at IMPACT and sharpen the focus on first-generation college students who might not otherwise have the means or opportunity to pursue a degree. Lee College waives the students’ tuition and GCCISD provides their textbooks.

The daughter of immigrants and a first-generation college student herself, Sprecher will study biochemistry at Bryn Mawr College on a full-tuition scholarship from the Posse Foundation, one of the most renowned college access and youth leadership development programs in the country.

Though excited to begin her next chapter in Pennsylvania, Sprecher said it won’t be easy to leave behind the teachers and administrators who pushed her to discover her talents — or the IMPACT classmates who became more like brothers and sisters as they encouraged each other through the rigors of balancing both high school and collegiate coursework.

“A friend in one of my college courses is a single mother, and she tells her 10-year-old son that she wants him to be a great student like me,” Sprecher said. “That really makes me feel good. IMPACT was the ultimate challenge and I wanted to go after it. These past four years have been really rewarding and all the hard work has been worth it.”