

Lee College Alumna Receives SUV

Crystal Rios, who graduated from Lee College in December with a certificate in cosmetology, is proof that no obstacle will stand in her way.

Last year the young mother of two was badly injured in an accident that left her without a car. For months Rios relied on family and friends to get her to cosmetology class at the Baytown campus, to her job at ULTA Beauty and to take her children to the Harris County Department of Education's Head Start Program in Baytown.



Crystal Rios and Lee College President Dr. Lynda Villanueva at Fall Commencement on Dec. 10, 2022.

Rios admits it was tough juggling a school and work schedule while being a mom to three-year-old Aubrie and a 1-year-old Jordan. Her determination and perseverance were not only noticed, but they were also rewarded. Right before the holidays, and just days after she graduated with her cosmetology certificate, Rios was gifted a rehabbed 2012 Ford Escape from Bates Auto Collision Centers.

"In a season in our world where hard work and self-determination and the desire to be independent and support yourself is not always celebrated; we are celebrating that today," said Leila Bates, co-owner, Bates Auto Collision Centers.

Through a partnership with HCDE Head Start, Bates Collision gives two refurbished cars to parents who are actively involved in their children's lives and demonstrate responsible parenting. Bates employees donate their time and skills to work on the

vehicles and help fill them with gifts. Other community members and businesses donate gas, car insurance, materials needed to rehab the vehicles, and gift cards.

"It's such a blessing to win a car," said Rios. "They went through all the Head Start schools and chose me. What an honor."

While she's grateful to have received new transportation and her independence back, Rios also acknowledges what Lee College has done for her and has encouraging words for others who may be in her position.

"The Student Resource and Advocacy Center helped me tremendously with gas cards, diapers and food. If you are a single mom and a student at Lee College, you can do it. If I did it for eight months with no car, so can you," Rios shared.

2023 is already off to a good start for Rios, who is working toward taking her state licensure exam. Once she has her license in hand, ULTA will promote her to a full-time hair stylist. As for plans down the road, Rios says she would like to own her own business.