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CCHS Grad Defies Odds, Becomes Dentist

Moultrie, Georgia – June 13, 2022 – In 2012, Jose Vargas was full of dreams and ambition. He graduated from Colquitt County High School as a merit scholar, something he had worked tirelessly to achieve. Naturally, many people think the next step would be college for an academically successful student. As Jose had already learned, nothing is as easy as it seems.

When Jose was just fourteen, he worked twelve-hour shifts picking vegetables for local farmers. He worked six days a week for less than minimum wage. In a recent social media post, Jose stated, “I remember not being able to stand up straight after a full day’s harvest. I remember hiding under a moving truck to find shade from the 100-degree weather. I remember having my entire face covered in dirt and having to swat at flies to be able to eat on my 15-minute lunch break. I remember wanting out every day and having to push through it anyway.” Many of us would have given up, but not Jose. He overcame his circumstances which included working those long days in the fields and then later, much more significant obstacles to achieving his dreams.



Dr. Vargas in his official “white coat” and with his family on the day of his graduation from Northwestern University in Illinois.

After graduating high school, Jose wanted to attend college but soon found out how hard that would be. He decided to attend ABAC in Tifton. Even enrolling in a local college close to home was a big obstacle and a significant financial decision. Initially accepted and enrolled, he was not eligible for state and federal financial aid grants. He was also considered an out-of-state student, being granted a waiver not to be regarded as an international student. On top of all that, there was a transportation issue as he did not have a drivers license. With the support of his parents, he was able to enroll and start college. Not long after that, President Obama implemented the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA). Jose met the eligibility requirements and was approved.

With a bit of relief, for the time being, Jose continued his post-secondary studies at ABAC as a biology major, where he graduated Cum Laude. “ABAC was a great experience,” stated Jose. “The biology program was very demanding, to say the least, but they were there every step of the way to help me. The program prepared me well.”

At this point, things seem to be looking up for Jose. His dreams of completing his college education are becoming a reality. His biggest dream is yet to come. He planned to enroll in dental school to become a licensed dentist. Once again, he would face obstacles he did not know existed. For about a year and a half, he could not find a

college that would accept him. During that time, he worked at a local Mexican restaurant and continued to research colleges that might accept him.

He found Midwestern University in Illinois, and the college assured him he was eligible to apply. He had a 4% chance of being accepted. “That’s all I ever wanted, a chance,” he stated. According to Jose, he wrote his personal statement, took the entrance exam, and completed everything else for the application process. He was selected for the next round, which included an interview that he prepared for over a month. He did it! He was accepted. Then came the realization that he was again not eligible for federal loans. With the help of his family, he was able to enroll in the dental program at Midwestern in September of 2018. And as of May 26, 2022, Jose Vargas is Dr. Jose Vargas, DMD.

After all of those challenges to get to graduation, Jose would do it all over again. He stated, “In the end, I wouldn’t trade any of this because these disadvantages gave me strength when I needed it most. The strength to keep going when I got overwhelmed in dental school. The strength to blindly pursue an education when all my efforts led to dead ends. And finally, these humble beginnings taught me to never take anything for granted. That even on the worst days in school, at least I wasn’t picking anymore.” He plans to return to South Georgia to practice dentistry and has already signed with a dental service organization (DSO) to practice in the area.

“On behalf of the Colquitt County School District, we are honored to call Dr. Vargas a Packer Point of Pride,” stated Superintendent Ben Wiggins. “We are thrilled to know he is coming home to practice, and we look forward to inviting him to the high school to talk about his experiences and hopefully be a mentor to others.”

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