

# Scholarships honor the son of immigrants

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NEW BRITAIN — When American Savings Foundation Robert T. Kenney Scholars Joshua Rivera and Luis Rivera attended New Britain High School, they both played football. But the brothers were on another team that had an even bigger impact on their future.

Through a financial literacy program at the Human Resources Agency of New Britain, they both had the opportunity to train as certified tax preparers. With this skill, they volunteered with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) at HRA, a team of volunteers who, each spring, help hundreds of New Britain residents complete their tax forms.

“The VITA program helped me gain experience in the customer service side of finance,” said Joshua Rivera. “Luis and I both also joined New Britain High School’s Academy of Finance, and the Future Business Leaders of America. Now we are both majoring in Business Administration at Husson University in Maine.”

Luis Rivera said working with VITA offered him one of his first real-world work experiences. “And it helped me start building the kind of resume that I know businesses are going to be looking for when I graduate,” he said. “I’ve wanted to work in business since middle school, and experiences like VITA will help show that I can be an asset to any company or organization.”

The VITA program at HRA was featured in a video at the annual American Savings Foundation scholarship reception last week, where the foundation celebrated the 392 recipients of the Robert T. Kenney Scholarship for the 2016-2017 academic year. This includes both first-time recipients and those receiving renewals of the scholarship.

“We believe this scholarship is so important to our students and families because it is one they can reapply to for up to four academic years,” said Maria Falvo, president and chief executive officer of the American Savings Foundation.

“We see this as a long-term investment in our scholars, and we try to keep in touch with them after they graduate. It’s great when successful alumni come back to speak to our next generation of scholars.”

Two previous scholarship recipients appeared as guest speakers during the program. Desiree Cameron-Ayeni is now the director of financial aid at the Yale School of Medicine. Justin Martella is a former financial crimes detective, who now works in wealth management. Both discussed



American Savings Foundation scholarship winners

their experiences launching careers in the world of business and finance.

In addition to the college students and family members in the audience, the foundation hosted groups of younger students from several local youth development programs to attend, including the Boys & Girls Club of New Britain, the Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program, HRA of New Britain, New Britain Police Activity League, Opportunities Industrialization Center of New Britain, and the Sisters in Science from the New Britain Youth Museum.

The scholarship program is named in memory of Robert T. Kenney, whose original vision led to the creation of the American Savings Foundation. Kenney grew up in Waterbury, the son of immigrants who instilled in their children the values of education and hard work. He became a leader in the banking industry in Connecticut, and was chairman, president and CEO of American Savings Bank from 1991 to 2003. “From his own experiences, Kenney understood the importance of making a college education affordable for the next generations of leaders,” said Falvo.

The foundation also awards grants to area nonprofits. Since its inception in 1995, the foundation has contributed over \$48 million in total grants and scholarships in central Connecticut. Scholarships are awarded to students from 64 towns.

— Christopher Fortier, staff writer