



3240 Fort Road • Toppenish, WA 98948
(509) 865-8500

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Contact: David Mance, Media Relations Coordinator, 509-969-6084 or mance_d@heritage.edu.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heritage University Student's Work Brings Windfall to Lower Valley Charity

Toppenish, WA – It will be a great New Year for one Lower Valley non-profit, thanks to the efforts of one Heritage University student. Alma Sanchez, a senior majoring in social work, authored a grant which resulted in Friends of Granger receiving a \$15,000 grant from the Yakima Valley Community Foundation. Friends of Granger is a small non-profit that serves low income families in Granger by providing assistance with basic needs. They are committed to making education a pathway out of poverty by improving attendance in the Granger School District. Friends of Granger will use the grant to expand an attendance incentive program also started by Sanchez.

This fall, Sanchez introduced the Every Child, Every Seat, Every Day program at Granger Middle School. The program provides quarterly incentives, such as e gift cards and movie passes, to students to attend school every day, as well as incentives for their parents. At the end of the school year students with perfect attendance will be entered into a drawing for one of five iPad's to be given away at the year-end family celebration. Only a half a year into the school year and the program is showing promising results. During the first quarter 100 students had not missed a day of class, a huge improvement over last year when only six had perfect attendance.

Sanchez was very excited to hear Friends of Granger was one of the 26 grants awarded to local non-profits across the valley. "I can't tell you how thrilled I was with this news because I believe education is key to a more successful and fulfilling life. By expanding this program, I'm confident we will see significant increases in attendance, and that means more students will graduate and go on to college," she said.

Going to college and earning a degree to make a better life for her family has always been a goal for Sanchez. So four years ago, in her mid-30s, she enrolled at Heritage University. During her sophomore year she joined Heritage University's Office of Advancement as an Administrative Assistant to earn money to finish school. Now as she nears graduation, she hopes her incentive program can be adopted by other school districts with similar attendance challenges.

Friends of Granger was started in 2003 by Joan Wallace, then president of Wallace Properties in Bellevue, and Janet Wheaton, then principal of Roosevelt Elementary School, in Granger. In addition to helping Granger families during the holidays, the 501c3 non-profit has held a month-long summer day camp for the past three years and has established an emergency fund to help families in crisis.

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Heritage University is a non-profit, independent, regionally accredited institution of higher education offering undergraduate and graduate education across the state of Washington.