

PYO honors outstanding student performance

By Spencer Carney and Keeley Gay
The Durham VOICE

Partners for Youth Opportunity (PYO) recently awarded three scholarships to students in the program.

Each scholarship is worth \$1,000 to help students pay for their college education.

The Tommee Blackmon Scholarship

Emmanuel Johnson was awarded the Tommee Blackmon Scholarship, named after YO:Durham Executive Director and founder Susan Blackmon's son who died. A graduating senior at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Johnson is majoring in sociology with a minor in sports journalism.

Johnson said he got involved with PYO when his dad had surgery and was unemployed, and his family needed financial assistance.

"Every time I go back to Durham, I check in with PYO," Johnson said. "I have a mentor through them, and I'm still connected to my mentor. We talk often."

He said his mom is paying his student loans on a payment plan and has roughly \$1,000 to \$2,000 left to pay.

"This scholarship will help her pay that off more quickly and also help with my transition into the real world, and just lighten the load for me as well, not having to pay so much money back," he said.

Johnson said PYO has been a great source of help and encouragement, and that they are always trying to find opportunities that can help and benefit the students in the program.

"They have just been great over the years," Johnson said. "Helping with everything and with the journey through college, because it definitely has been a journey and they've been a positive factor in my road to graduation."

He worked for The Durham VOICE this past year, making audio stories about events going on in the city. After college, Johnson wants to go into radio production.

The Adriel Williams Scholarship

The Adriel Williams Scholarship was given to Zubair Siam, a senior at UNC-Greensboro. He is studying information systems management with a minor in political science, and will be graduating in December.

"I was originally involved in PYO in my sophomore year of high school," Siam said. "A teacher of mine told me about this organization that would maybe help me



Ron'Asia Rogers is one of three recipients of a \$1,000 Partners for Youth Opportunity scholarship to help her afford nursing school. Emmanuel Johnson and Zubair Siam also received \$1,000 scholarships. (Photo courtesy of PYO)

out financially or just help me get up on my feet. So he gave me the contact info for PYO and I applied."

Siam said there are a lot of fees attached to graduating from college.

"A lot of stress is going to come upon me within the next few weeks," he said, "because not only do I have to worry about fees, but I also have to worry about getting a job after college and whatnot."

He said the money will help him pay off some of his loans, so he doesn't have to worry about being able to afford a room and tuition.

"PYO has had this amazing influence on me because they set me up with a job my senior year of high school at Duke Hospital, where I was a research assistant," Siam said.

He said that this job was one of the biggest ways he got to learn what a professional environment and research position look like.

Siam also attended PYO's summer career academy where he learned to build himself up professionally. He said that because of PYO's impact, he's managed to become a senior senator for UNC-G's Student Government Association, as well as the co-chief for the University Marshals.

"I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without PYO's assistance," Siam said. "They're like a second family to me,

and I will never forget all of the assistance they provided me with."

The Dr. Phail Wynn Scholarship

The final scholarship is the Dr. Phail Wynn Scholarship, which was awarded to Ron'Asia Rogers. Rogers is from Delaware originally, but now lives in Durham. She is graduating from the Durham Performance Learning Center and is on the leadership team in the cosmetology program.

"The scholarship is really about striving to finish school," Rogers said.

Rogers said she has been involved in PYO since her sophomore year of high school. After she graduates from the Learning Center, she plans to go to Durham Technical Community College this summer to become a certified nursing assistant. In the fall, she will return to become a licensed practical nurse. Rogers said she took cosmetology classes so she'll be able to do her client's hair while working with them as a nurse practitioner.

"It means a lot to know that other people want to help me succeed in life and to be able to see me become something," Rogers said. "I didn't want to finish high school, and to know that they all believe in me to be able to graduate college means a lot to me."