



YESENIA GONZALEZ MEJIA, 2008 Julio Mata Scholarship Winner

I was born and raised in Gilroy. I still remember the bus ride to San Ysidro Elementary. Even though it was located away from the town, I loved that there was so much history behind the school. San Ysidro Elementary is also the school that taught me English and by third grade I was given my certificate in English proficiency.

When I started 6th grade at Brownell Middle School, it was quite the change. It was during middle school that I started learning about college and I knew that one day I would be attending.

I have always loved school. While at Gilroy High School, I would sign up for summer classes to get ahead and sometimes just for fun. One summer I decided to take a “fun” class, a cooking class. During that class we had a presentation from a culinary academy where I learned that degrees focused on hospitality and even planning existed. I grew up with my parents working in the events industry but I had not been aware that was an area of study. At that moment I knew what my major in college would be.

It wasn't until I transferred into a four-year university that I moved away from Gilroy. Having been one of the recipients of the Julio Mata Scholarship (provided by the Gilroy Foundation) in 2008, made it feasible for me to attend Gavilan College to then transfer to San Francisco State University. I graduated with my BS degree in Hospitality with an emphasis in event planning and stayed working in the city for a couple more years. I then decided to move back to Gilroy. It came full circle in 2016 when I started working for the Gilroy Foundation.

My goal after graduating from SFSU was to plan events for nonprofits, and the Gilroy Foundation once again helped me reach that goal. After two great years with the Gilroy Foundation as a part-time employee working on the Garlic Festival, “A Day in the Country,” (Gilroy Foundation’s signature event), the Annual Meeting and various other gatherings of membership, a new opportunity presented itself. I became a full-time employee--Lifestyle Manager with Capitol Concierge at a “well-known tech company” located in Menlo Park. I am now responsible for scheduling travel arrangements and conventions for employees there.

As I continue advancing in my career, I look forward to continuing to improve my skills and am grateful for the many opportunities that have come my way. I enjoyed my work with nonprofits and will continue to be an Ambassador for the Gilroy Foundation.