Off to Columbia University

Local student goes from gangs to Ivy League

BY AMANDA MARINACCIO

An inspiration to everyone she encounters, one local Bronxite has overcome numerous obstacles to go from a high school drop out to earning a full scholarship to Columbia University.

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Jessica Rivera

Jessica Rivera was raised in Soundview by her mother until she was 12 years old. At this young age, her mother left her, devastating Rivera.

"My mother was my best friend, so when she left I didn't care about anything else," said Rivera.

Shortly after moving into an overcrowded apartment with her grandmother, Rivera dropped out of school. By 16 her mother had returned, but Rivera already had her own place in Hunts Point and was working for minimum wage at fast food establishments.

The turning point for Rivera came one night when the police raided the home of an individual she had been visiting. One of the officers pulled her aside to inform Rivera of her associate's violent history. Realizing her life had taken a bad turn, Rivera decided to make something of herself.

"That was a real wake up call for me," said Rivera. "My mother came to pick me up at the precinct and I decided I needed to do something with myself before I ended up dead or in jail."

At 23, after only two months of classes, Rivera was able to earn her G.E.D., and then enrolled in Hostos Community College, having been accepted into the Accelerated Studies in Associates Program.

"After my first semester I had a 3.85 grade point average and received a letter to apply for the Global Scholars Program and I went to the orientation and learned about the possibility of attending Columbia University," said Rivera. "I had wanted to go to Columbia since I was 8, so I applied."

This fall, Rivera will be starting at Columbia University School of General Studies on a full scholarship.

"I'm so excited and shocked I still don't believe it's happening," said Rivera. "I still feel like it's a dream and I'm going to wake up and it's all going to end."

When she completes her B.A., Rivera is eligible for and plans to apply to the Columbia University School of International Affairs to earn a master's degree.

PVC to feed hungry seniors

Patterson Volunteer Committee has announced they will begin a Feeding Hungry Seniors program this fall.

In commenting on this new program, Wallace Hasan, PVC chair, said, "While there are senior citizen centers and Meals on Wheels programs throughout the Bronx, there are many seniors who will or cannot avail themselves of these services. This is where PVC will come in. We will be looking for these very same seniors to be a part of this program."

For further information call (718) 292-0619.