

## Women of Quail Creek awarding \$87,500 in scholarships Wednesday

By Kim Smith [kim.smith@gvnews.com](mailto:kim.smith@gvnews.com) May 9, 2026

Rebecca Rodriguez was half way through college when she was forced to watch as her mom waged war with the cancer invading her body. That hard-won battle changed the course of her life.

Rodriguez, 27, switched her major from speech languages and hearing sciences to pre-med and thanks to The Women of Quail Creek, her hefty medical school bills will be mitigated.

Since 2016, the TWOQC has been awarding scholarships to high school girls and women returning to school using money raised through their annual Javelina Hoedown event and donations from businesses and individuals.

On Wednesday, the TWOQC will award \$87,500 through 25 scholarships, bringing the total amount of scholarships awarded to more than \$439,000.

Rodriguez, who graduated from Walden Grove High School and is finishing up her first year of med school at the University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix, has twice received a \$3,500 scholarship from the non-profit organization.

Her sister, Raquel, 21, is also a two-time recipient. She's at the UA and plans to become a nurse.

Rodriguez first heard about the scholarship opportunity from Sylvia Perry, a family friend who is on the TWOQC's scholarship committee.

The timing was perfect because she had just graduated and was preparing to take the entrance exam for medical school.

She knew medical school was going to cost \$46,000 a year, but her mind was made up. She wanted to become a doctor after watching her mother's struggle.

"I'm the oldest daughter, and, you know, I think culturally, there's a lot of responsibility in taking care of the family. And so, when my mom was in a position that was that vulnerable and just difficult for all of us, I had that feeling of wanting to help as much as I could, but feeling helpless because I knew nothing about medicine," Rodriguez said. "I wasn't part of her healthcare team. I didn't know what the doctors were talking about. I didn't know what was going to happen next, and that was a feeling that I did not want to feel again."

She also thought about all of the other families experiencing the same feelings.

"There are plenty of people that have to navigate healthcare and feel lost, and I'm certain about what's going on, and what an honor it would be for me to be someone that can hold someone's hand and tell them exactly what's happening and make sure that they're just as aware of what's going on as I would be as a future physician," she said.

She took a year off of school to study for the entrance exam while also working at the El Rio Healthcare Center making sure patients with uncontrolled diabetes came in for their appointments, setting up transportation for them and working through any other barriers to proper healthcare, including insurance snafus.

Rodriguez also spent another year in the Pathway Scholars Program.

“It took 12 students with underrepresented backgrounds, with a mission of preparing us, acclimating us for medical school. So, we took a few of the medical school classes. We did scholarly projects. It was essentially just a way of bringing in more underrepresented students, and once finishing that program, we got automatic matriculation into the medical school itself,” Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez’s mom, who is the director of the Shepherd’s Fold Preschool in Green Valley, is doing well now, Rodriguez said, noting her brother, Gabriel, was also influenced by her illness. He’s now a paramedic in Tombstone.

Rodriguez said she isn’t quite sure what type of medicine she’ll practice yet, but she knows she wants to help people in underserved areas. Her mom is from Honduras and her father, Felipe, a research tech in the UA’s Mirror Lab, is from Guatemala.

“So far, what I’m interested in is family medicine, ob/gyn, psychiatry and maybe emergency medicine,” she said.

Rodriguez said she is incredibly grateful to the TWOQC for the financial help.

“It’s really no secret that the cost of medical school is absolutely insane. Most, if not all, people cannot afford to go to medical school without acquiring some form of debt or relying on scholarship. So, I’m insanely grateful that I’ve had this much support, this much financial support, because not only is there the cost of tuition that I have to think about, there’s also other hidden fees, if you will,” she said.

She’s equally grateful for the emotional support she gets from the TWOQC.

“They didn’t just award me a scholarship and wish me good luck. They’ve been with me in this process as well. So, when I was awarded the scholarship, they were very adamant about wanting to be my support and they followed up on that,” Rodriguez said. “I was paired with Sylvia Perry, who I call Grandma Sylvia, and she checks up on me every now and then, just reminding me that she’s proud of me, that she has my back and just having that extra support has meant so much because I could not do this on my own. I could not do this without my community and the women of Quail Creek are my community.”

She also recently attended a mixer where donors and TWOQC scholarship committee members got to meet with scholarship recipients.

“They really don’t miss an opportunity to let me know that they’re proud of me and they’re glad that I was someone who won the scholarship and that means the world to me,” she said. “I’m so grateful for them and I really hope that I can pay it back one day.”

This summer Rodriguez will be working with a physician near the border as part of a rural health initiative.

Perry, who has known the Rodriguez family for more than a decade, said she is proud of the fact the scholarship program has been able to help out so many young ladies and continues to grow.

Back when it started, they gave one \$1,000 scholarship to one Walden Grove graduate and one Sahuarita High School graduate.

The scholarship process is a rigorous one that requires the young ladies to fill out an application, provide their grades, get references and interview.

As for Rodriguez, Perry said she's always been impressed with how focused she is.

"She's a really, really neat person. She's poised. She has a focus on what she wants to do, and she's not going to quit till she gets there," Perry said.

Today's young people often get accused of lacking direction, but nothing could be further from the truth for those receiving these scholarships, Perry said.

"These young people do and it's gratifying to me to know that we can help them, and if we can go back and help them again," Perry said. "It just makes it better and we see their progress and it just warms your heart. It does."

Scholarships Director Deb Melton said over the years they've awarded 152 scholarships.

"I am so proud of our community and the women of Quail Creek, and particularly the women who serve on the scholarship committee for the work that they have done," Melton said. "The Women of Quail Creek has a membership of a little over 300 people, and the scholarship committee is around 30."

Melton said this year they affiliated with the Greater Green Valley Community Foundation, which manages \$8.3 million for 17 local nonprofits serving Sahuarita, Green Valley, Amado, Arivaca, Tubac, Tumacácori, Rio Rico and Nogales.

With their help, the plan is to develop a legacy program where people can choose to incorporate the scholarship program into their estate plan.

"We recognized a long time ago, because we're all old and we've been through a lot in our lives, that a lot of women, particularly, have their educations interrupted when they're young. They might get married young. They might not have the funds to go to school right away out of high school, and need to work for a few years, they might end up getting pregnant," Melton said.

Melton said TWOQC are incredibly thankful everyone who has made the scholarship program such a success.

"I feel very strongly that it is important, and everybody on my committee feels this way. It's important for women to make sure that they have an education and can provide for themselves economically," Melton said. "And so, we want women to feel empowered, and by raising funds and giving them away to young women who need it to go to school and secure their future and make sure that they can contribute, that

just means everything to me and to everyone on the committee, everyone on the committee feels that way.”

## *You're invited*

The Women of Quail Creek is holding a scholarship awards ceremony at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 13, at the Madera Ballroom in Quail Creek. This year, 25 scholarships will be awarded to high school girls and women returning to school.