

# SM Foundation continues to bring hope to Filipino youth

By: Angela Kiara S. Brillantes

“To empower the marginalized youth’s education” is what Henry Sy, Sr. believed is key to improving Filipino lives and, thus, drove SM Foundation, Inc. (SMFI), the corporate social responsibility arm of SM, to provide financial assistance for higher education. The foundation has gone beyond this landmark initiative throughout the years, producing successful professionals, transforming communities, and shaping a better future for the country.

Started in 1983, the SMFI has served communities by providing educational opportunities that will help students achieve their dreams. So far, it has produced more than 8,000 college graduates and technical-vocational graduates through its scholarship programs.

This year, to continue empowering education in Filipino communities, SMFI welcomed 470 scholars at its online awarding of the SM College Scholarship, “Limitless.”

## INSPIRING STORIES OF BUILDING DREAMS

SMFI has brought success to many of its graduates. One is SM Scholar Alumni Dave Austeinn Mission. For Mr. Mission, being an SM Scholar was a life-changing opportunity.

Eldest in a family of six, applying to college was “a big challenge” without a scholarship, knowing how they already struggled to allocate money for daily essentials.

“With the privilege of having a scholarship, the financial weight of sending me to college was eased. The help was even extended as I was able to finance my brothers’ school fees in high school,” Mr. Mission said.

From being a simple student and a part-time waiter, SMFI became his ticket to becoming the professional that he is today. Becoming part of SM Retail in 2011, he was able to climb the ranks and now holds the Treasury Manager position.

“The SM group has opened many doors of opportunity for my career. It started with my scholarship up until I became an employee. They sponsored our trainings within and outside the company. This has exposed me to the dealings of business engagements with the operations and other support teams,” he said.

Beyond a fulfilling career at SM, Mr. Mission was able to provide financial security to his family and help his siblings finish their studies at well-known educational institutions. Carrying SM core values with him, he spreads social good through volunteering during calamities and adopting stray cats.

Another SM scholar alumna is Grace Ortega, who is now a regional accounting officer and has been working with SM for 17 years.

“College education is not definite for me and my three siblings,” Ms. Ortega recalled. As a family who makes bags and wallets for a living, nothing was certain and they were still struggling. Because of her financial situation, college applications were difficult as well. She could not afford to take other applications; but, fortunately, she passed at Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila.

For Ms. Ortega, SMFI came to the rescue, which she only discovered after another SMFI alumni talked about the program. After being offered an SM scholarship, she was able to afford her scholastic needs while helping with the needs of her family.

“SM Foundation was a blessing not only to me but also to my family,” Ms. Ortega said. “Because of the foundation, I got to buy books and supplies needed. Transportation and meal allowances weren’t a problem, either. And since I didn’t have tuition fees, I was able to share my allowance with my siblings,” she recalled.

The foundation was also a bridge that connected her to her job. Through the foundation’s job fairs for scholars, she was able to land a job at SM. After saving up for a



SM scholar alumna Grace Ortega



New scholar Jashrylle Clyde Fernandez



Former scholar Dave Austeinn Mission



SM group’s late founder Tatang Henry Sy, Sr., Nanang Felicidad Sy and SM Foundation employees during the 13<sup>th</sup> Presentation of Scholar Graduates



The SM Foundation awarded scholarships to about 470 college freshmen for the 2023-2024 school year.

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review school, she passed the accountancy board exam and continued working with SM until she became a regional accounting officer.

“I was able to get a house for my family in Cavite, and another one for my own family. I drive my own car, and we do have the means to travel locally. With our life today, we can plan and save up to travel outside the country,” she said.

For Ms. Ortega, the SM scholarship program has impacted her life journey and has been the first step toward success.

“Be limitless,” Ms. Ortega advised this year’s new scholars. “It will definitely not be easy. Challenges and difficulties are always

there. Do not worry too much. Help is always there. This is just the start of your great journey ahead. Grab this opportunity with both hands.”

## NEXT CHAPTER FOR NEXT SCHOLARS

One of the new scholars of SMFI is Jashrylle Clyde Fernandez, who is taking a Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English.

“I didn’t know I would go to college,” Ms. Fernandez shared. Before the scholarship, they had been financially challenged and barely had enough saved to buy food.

For her, the SM Scholarship helped her turn her life around. She has been given an

opportunity to pursue a career in teaching — a long-time dream of hers — and become an inspiration to others.

“I applied for the SM Foundation scholarship because I really needed it and we are not financially capable. Aside from needing it, I admire the work that the SM Foundation has done for so many students before. I was so inspired by the stories I saw face-to-face, and I wanted to be someone who can inspire others through my story,” she said.

For Ms. Fernandez, getting into the scholarship program has already taught her so many things. Hard work and effort are not only applicable when studying, so she will take this advice even in the outside world.

As a scholar, the SMFI not only has been motivating her as she begins her college journey, but it also taught her how to take initiative and be a leader so that she can be a role model to everyone.

“I am really grateful for the SM Foundation scholarship. I think there are no words to ever amount to the gratitude I have for the SM Foundation,” she said.