**Change Starts Now**

Interviewing for one of the top six Most Valuable Student scholarships is a breeze compared to the challenge the National Judges face when selecting the winners. All Top 20 MVS scholars are brilliant, compassionate students who already have impressive resumes of building stronger communities and big plans to continue making change.

Sponsored by Frederick, Md., Lodge No. 684, Diya Jha was one of two students awarded a $50,000 scholarship. She plans to attend Yale University and major in computer science and has already started making a huge difference in her community.

“My school is a Title 1 school where more than 46 percent of the students come from low-income backgrounds,” says Diya, who developed Let’s TALC (Teach, Access, Learn, Choice), a program that educates students on the dangers of opioids while helping them find alternative passions. “My aspirations go beyond avoiding drugs myself—I want to create positive change in my community.”

The program encourages students to share their experiences and participate in skill development courses and other community-building activities as an alternative to drug use.

“I want my work to continue, so I recruited underclassmen,” says Diya. “I am a person who believes in putting in the work to make things better.”

That was a common theme among the Top 20 scholars, including $50,000 winner, Agam Igwe, who is sponsored by Towson, Md., Lodge No. 469.

On September 11, 2001, Agam’s parents were headed to the Twin Towers for an appointment when his mother became unusually sick, causing them to stay home. That decision potentially saved their lives and became a focal point of Agam’s youth.

Learning about the heroic actions of first responders that day inspired Agam to join the Junior Firefighters program. By third grade, he was lifting 150-pound dummies onto his shoulder during rescue drills.

Agam plans to attend Stanford University and study engineering. His career dreams include working with surgical robotics, so entire surgeries can be performed remotely.

“I aspire to merge concepts of robotic kinematics, cellular imaging, and biomaterials, in hopes of creating faster, more affordable tools for pediatric cancer patients,” says Agam, a survivor himself.

This summer, Agam will intern at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory & Children’s Hospital, where he will turn data into model representations.

“I strive to be in a community of innovative thinkers who see connections between studying engineering and benefiting society,” says Agam. “I won’t have to wait until I’m out of college to start making a difference.”

Diya and Agam both earned $50,000 scholarships. The second-place winners, earning $40,000, are Becca Mizrachy, sponsored by Boca Raton, Fla., Lodge No. 2166, and William (Joshua) Jones, sponsored by Marshall, Texas, Lodge No. 683. The third-place winners of $30,000 are Sophie Kloppenburg, sponsored by Mount Vernon, Ind., Lodge No. 277, and Aaron Tran, sponsored by Hollister, Calif., Lodge No. 1436.

*For 2023-24, the Elks National Foundation allocated nearly $2.9 million to fund the Most Valuable Student scholarship program, which includes 502 four-year scholarships ranging from $4,000 to $50,000. For more information about the Most Valuable Student scholarship program, including eligibility and deadlines, visit* ***enf.elks.org/MVS****.*