

TPHS grad earns scholarship, invaluable experience through Las Californias Youth Leadership Program

By Karen Thompson

Although he's just 17 years old, Ricardo Rosen of Del Mar is already an expert on the thorny policy issues that affect the Tijuana/San Diego border region.

The recent Torrey Pines High School graduate is one of 13 students (from both sides of the border) who participated in the year-long Las Californias Youth Leadership Program (LCYLP), which seeks to develop future leaders for the region. Rosen also received a \$1,000 college scholarship from the program.

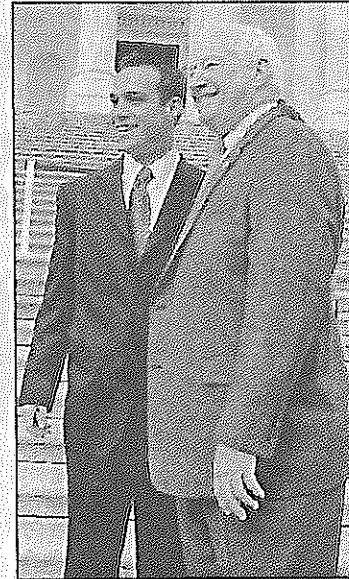
"The experience was amazing. It changed my life. It changed the way I look at the border region," said Rosen of the program, which included monthly seminars, community service projects, a mentorship and job shadowing program, and meetings with local, state and federal officials in both countries.

Rosen said that the all-expenses-paid trips to Washington D.C. and New York last summer, and to Mexico City this spring were the highlights of the program. In Washington, the group met with members of congress and with Asa Hutchinson, under secretary for border and transportation security at the Department of Homeland Security.

"We were able to see both sides of the coin, the realities of both countries. What's most important is for leaders to look at it as one region, and not just look at it just from their own perspective. We need a lot more communication between the sides."

Rosen believes that immigration is definitely the largest issue facing the region.

"And the problems can't just be fixed on the surface. They need to be fixed from the roots down. We need to improve the education-



Ricardo Rozen on the Capitol steps with Congressman Jim Kolbe (R) Arizona.

al system in Mexico, so that immigration is no longer the last option, and so that less people are desperate to come here for jobs."

Rosen himself is an immigrant from Mexico. He moved with his family from Mexico City to Del Mar, at the age of 12, when his father took a job here.

"I left Mexico with a very bad impression of the country. But through the program I've seen that Mexico has a lot of good things, and also that the U.S. has its faults too. It's not a perfect country. A lot of people struggle here," he said.

LCYLP was created by the International Community Foundation (ICF), an arm of the San Diego Foundation. ICF's main focus is helping donors give money to various nonprofit organizations in Asia and Latin America, but the foundation's work in Baja California inspired them to start LCYLP.

"Seventy percent of our grant-making is focused in Baja California. We recognized a need for more leadership there. We thought it was important to begin promoting youth leadership," said ICF President Richard Kiy.

The goal of LCYLP's curriculum is twofold: to educate students on border issues, and to help them develop leadership skills.

This was LCYLP's first year, and the foundation is currently raising money for a second round. LCYLP's next yearlong session will begin in the fall of 2005, but the foundation hopes to begin offering the program annually in the near future.

"We live in a border region that has a lot of shared issues, and there's a continued need to work together on those," said Kiy, who cited immigration, education, healthcare and homeland security as examples.

"The whole idea of this program was to encourage them to come back to the region where they live [as adults], and get them to realize that they can make a difference here," he added.

To be selected for LCYLP, applicants had to be of Mexican origin, and fluent in Spanish and English. In addition, they had to have demonstrated leadership in their communities and hold grade point averages of 3.5 or higher. Rosen was one of 13 students chosen from 100 applicants to the program.

This fall, Rosen, who last year served as captain of both the Torrey Pines High School soccer team and the Del Mar Sharks boys under 19 soccer team, will begin college at USC. He plans to double-major in political science and international relations, and hopes to someday use his degree to continue working on border issues.