Katelyn (Cox) Lester (2021) won our Eckman Award three times, and wrote an award-winning essay on the father of the Webb Society of Texas-Walter Prescott Webb. The state Webb Society has been a source of many conferences and awards for us. The daughter of the Tanzania missionary married Tate Lester, and now will be living in Scroggins with their baby, Henry.

Like Katelyn, Olivia Griffin (2019) began her time with us as a devout, sweet, backseat kind of person, who suddenly delivered up a major work of scholarship, and began to win everything. Griffin came in first in the Texas State Caldwell contest for her pioneering essay on Justin Dart, publishing it. She is now teaching English, and learning Arabic on the North African coast.

Aaliyah Merced Avellaneda wins NTCC’s Eleventh Jack Kent Cooke
Avellaneda, featured above in the center photograph with former Jack Kent Cooke winner, Brenda Godoy, graduated from Mount Pleasant High School during the dark spring days of the COVID epidemic in 2020. The summer that followed saw a precipitous spike in COVID cases in Mount Pleasant, and Avellaneda’s family was not spared. Her first college semester took place mainly live at NTCC, but it was a time of social distancing, and masks. Avellaneda with an interest in law, education, and legislation persevered, and for her freshman honors project decided she would like to do a study of Mount Pleasant’s own Lieutenant Governor, Bill Ratliff. She read his biography, and asked if she could interview the former Texas Ticket-splitter. Such a request during the COVID fall involved NTCC President Clinton, and a willing Ratliff. Three spaced people met wearing masks in the beautiful Biggers room at NTCC. What followed was perhaps the most historic student interview the college has known. Avellaneda had an impressive grasp of Ratliff’s life, and the Governor gave it his all.

Avellaneda’s final essay treated the approach of the politically mysterious Ratliff as an antidote to national polarization. She won $400 and a first-in-the-state Caldwell for her essay, and then, in poster form, a Britt Award of the Great Plains Honors Council. She also won two Eckman Awards her first year for the highest seminar averages and became NTCC’s 4th Dr. Jerry Wesson Scholar as the top academic sophmore (With Dr. Wesson above). In the 21-22 year, she won two more Eckmans, the first student in our history to reach that milestone, wrote the top seminar essay in the fall, presented in Orlando at the National Collegiate Honors Council, and won the $150K JKC. On hand at our NTCC victory dinner for Avellaneda, provided again by generous patrons, was former JKC winner Brenda Godoy. Ironically, Godoy had just won a second JKC and will attend Medical School in Fort Worth.
Our Beneficent Benefactors

We are humbled by the generous gifts we continue to receive from donors no longer living in our section of Texas, donors who in some cases have given from the beginning. Most notable in this category are Karen Harmon, and our former NTCC president Dr. Charles Florio.

As of this writing, there are still those catching COVID in Northeast Texas. The disease put a damper on our Thank You Dinners. However, we have generous anonymous donors who funded a special dinner to announce the winners of the Jack Kent Cooke to Aaliyah Avellaneda with her family present. We are thankful too for gifts that have sparked academic competition among our best students. Another out-of-town anonymous giver has now covered the twenty $100 Eckman prizes we have been able to award every semester since 2017 (p. 3). As noted on the college blog, we have other in-class student awards as well.

Our Beneficent Benefactors

Regional Vanguard

Skyler Fondren (left) became the 8th student in our history to win a Britt Poster award of the Great Plains Honors Council. Jessie Parchman pioneered NTCC’s presence at NCUR. Avellaneda won a Coca Cola Bronze, nationally. Lower Left: NTCC Webb presenters at UT Austin. Jessie Parchman and Maiko Ettrata won 2nd and 3rd in the upper university division of the state Caldwell Top right: NTCC won its fourth group Caldwell Award for its film on Carol Shelby. Cad Bennett starred as Shelby, and Victor Diaz produced the film. Right: Six presented at the GPVC in Wichita. 

Star Sophomores

The 2020-2022 cohort had stellar moments. The Zoom conference of the State Webb Society in 2021 announced one lower-division winner from their ranks after another—Avellaneda, Risner, Hernandez, 3 of the 4! Bennett was a state vice president of PTK. Risner headed the NTCC student body, and Brian Ramirez led Phi Theta Kappa. As freshmen, they were the only cohort in our history to win all 4 McGraw-Hill poster awards.

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Deo Gratias! “Films and Subversive Play” By Dr. Andrew Yox, Honors Director

Two anomalous incidents come to mind as I consider my 28 years of teaching at NTCC. One involved a night class. It went 2 hours over, from 6 to almost 11 p.m. The students were thrilled and wanted the class to go on. Another enigma: one late-Thursday afternoon, during the summer, I saw students crammed into a classroom, hollering and shouting with delight. The first case? A sociology class that simulated gambling. The second? The table-top club, overseen by Professor Julie Ratliff.

Both appear to be examples of an extreme kind of student engagement called “subversive play” by Mark Carnes. In his Harvard-University-press-published book, "Minds on Fire" Carnes details worlds of learning where students take charge, and compete to form their own hierarchies. I am indebted to Drs. Rose and Fulgham for passing on this book. Like those who revered in the medieval feast of fools, students crammed into a classroom, hollering and shouting with delight. The first case? A sociology class that simulated gambling. The second? The table-top club, overseen by Professor Julie Ratliff.

Spring Happenings

We thank Drs. Jim and Paula Archer, and others for our 29th wonderful day trip, last September to Dallas. We took in Starbuck's, an encounter with SMU organist, Benjamin Kolodzieje, The North Park Center, the Dallas Arts district, and Allen-Americans hockey where we appear on the ice, above. To the right we see the winners of the annual McGraw-Hill poster contest, Skylar Fondren #1 ($400), Maxime Risner ($300), Viktor Diaz $200, and Bekah Contreras ($100). Our 14th Star Sophomore Skylar Fondren has exceeded expectations.

We thank Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery, Casey Slaght of/and McGraw Hill, and nine local judges! Winners of the 14th-Annual McGraw Hill Poster Contest

We thank Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery, Casey Slaght of/and McGraw Hill, and nine local judges!

Aaliyah Avellaneda (top left below) became the first student ever to win four $100 Eckman Awards, for having the top GPA in each honors seminar, and overall. She along with John Rodriguez (bottom right below) was named an All-Texas Scholar by Phi Theta Kappa. Our other Eckman winner, Hope Kelly, (top right below) became an honors student in the spring, and immediately rocketed up to number one in the Stat-Psych Seminar. She was homeschooled while her father served as a missionary in Mexico. Jordan Chapin (lower left below) became our 10th winner of the Chitsey Award for an honors student who most exceeded expectations.