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For Immediate Release

Four Women Receive Emerge Scholarships to Pursue Their College Education

ATLANTA (Oct. 25, 2017) – Four Georgia women have been awarded scholarships by Emerge, a non-profit Atlanta organization dedicated to helping women complete their college education.

Emerge provides educational scholarships to Georgia women who have faced obstacles such as divorce, poverty or illness that have interfered with their ability to complete their undergraduate degrees. Part of the scholarship criteria is that they give back to their communities.

Since 2001, Emerge has empowered 100 women by providing more than \$500,000 in academic scholarships. These educational experiences, combined with encouragement and support provided by Emerge volunteers, give women the opportunity to advance professionally and become self-sufficient for themselves, their families and communities.

Jane Hale Hopkins, Emerge president, said, “In the stories of these four women, inspiration, determination and persistence shine brightly. We are so proud of their dedication to their education. We are absolutely certain that they will go on to have a profound impact on their communities and the world.”

This year’s recipients include Cherry Bryant of Lawrenceville; Unica Hodge of Riverdale; Katee McNeill of Covington; and Liliana Spittal of Valdosta.

Bryant, 28, a Georgia State University student pursuing a bachelor’s in psychology, said she had to work hard to overcome dyslexia while in high school and college. Often, she felt overwhelmed and defeated until she met her 9th grade special education teacher who asked her, “What do you want to do with your life?” No one had ever asked her that question. Ms. Dalton encouraged her to go to college to obtain a degree.

“My college journey has been eventful and hard but worth all the experiences,” said Bryant, a single mother, who is involved in advocating for LGBTQ equality at Georgia State. She hopes to graduate in Fall 2019, and pursue a master’s degree.

Unica Hodge, 43, said she was unprepared for the rigors of college when she entered the University of Florida after high school. In her second year, her grandmother died and she also experienced a racial epithet, which she said she used as excuses not to pursue her education. In 1994, she moved to Atlanta and decided to pursue her studies again.

“Well, as so many stories often go, I met a man, became pregnant (having three beautiful blessings!) and discontinued my higher education yet again, this time with an extended hiatus of 20 years,” she wrote in her application.

After having worked in the social service industry for 20 years, she lost her job in March 2014, and two years later, lost her home. She had been “quasi-homeless” for the past nine months, but has since moved into a new home.

“Since returning to school, I have maintained a 3.89 GPA. I am even more determined, having experienced bouts of homelessness and poverty, to be a force for change in how the world handles social injustice and inequality,” she wrote.

Despite her own difficult circumstances, she shops for 12+ families and sorts and distributes fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as manages other volunteers.

She and her daughter are both enrolled at Georgia State University, with her daughter completing her third year abroad in England. Her oldest son is a training to become a firefighter.

She hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in social psychology.

For McNeill, 28, an early childhood education major with a special education focus, pursuing a college education means providing for her two sons and making a difference in the world.

“I am a single mother going to school to improve our current circumstances and provide my two boys with a brighter future. I’m working towards my life-long goal of becoming an educator in hopes of ‘being the change’ this world so desperately needs,” she wrote in her application.

McNeill’s son has autism and she works with Autism Speaks to increase awareness.

“I’m seeking a degree in special education because I have a duty as my son’s mother to advocate for his education and know exactly what’s going on. My goal is to do the same for my students. I want to empower parents to know their rights and help them fight for the appropriate education they deserve,” she expressed in her award application.

She plans to graduate in May and already visualizes herself walking across the stage.

A resident of Valdosta, Spittal, 36, attends Georgia Military College, pursuing a bachelor’s in business administration. Born in Romania, Spittal was accepted to a college tuition free in Europe, but was unable to attend because of expenses like room and board and transportation. A strong feeling of responsibility of taking care of her mother resulted in taking jobs as an au pair in Europe.

When she came to Georgia, she got a job at a non-profit and took classes online at night after putting her children to bed. Feeling that she could do more to make an impact on the non-profit, she decided to go back to school after 15 years. But to complicate matters, her husband lost his job six months ago. “I

have been the only provider in our household, which has motivated me further to pursue my dream of becoming a CPA,” she said, adding that she expects to graduate in summer 2019.

“I would love to be able to work in a CPA office after I graduate, and am putting forth all effort to succeed. I am also very motivated by my children who are watching me back in school. I want to teach them to always be responsible and take care of their families when they grow up, but also to be true to their dreams and pursue them, and to expect that oftentimes, it will take a lot of work and determination.”

About Emerge

Since 2001, Emerge, a Georgia non-profit organization, has empowered 100 women through education by providing more than \$500,000 in academic scholarships. These educational experiences, combined with encouragement and support provided by Emerge volunteers, give women the opportunity to advance professionally and become self-sufficient for not only themselves, but also for their families and communities.

Emerge supports Georgia women who have demonstrated a deep commitment to reaching their educational goals and give back to their communities. Through the scholarships granted, women are able to realize their dreams and generate ripples of change in the world. For more information about Emerge, please visit www.emergescholarships.org.