

Champion high school runner inspires kids

Patti Zarling, Press-Gazette Media 3:46 p.m. CDT August 15, 2015



(Photo: File/Press-Gazette Media)

Armando Torres heads to the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in a few days to return to his business and accounting studies.

The 20-year-old said he might not be enrolled in college if not for his love for and dedication to running.

"It helped build my confidence," Torres, who lives in Green Bay, said recently. "And it helped me get a scholarship so I could afford college."

He won a number of high school running awards in cross-country and track and field at Green Bay's East High School and was named Press-Gazette Media's runner of the year in 2012.

This year, he finished 12th in the Bellin Run and was the top finisher from Green Bay.

Torres said it took a while to even be brave enough to try out for running or any other school activity, and he almost didn't do it. So he wants to help younger Hispanic kids get involved and volunteers with a youth sports program supported by Casa Alba Melanie Hispanic Community Resource Center in downtown Green Bay.

The sports group, open to kids 14 and under, has grown from a handful of students in 2013 to more than 40 this year. It started with running, and now includes swimming and soccer. Torres won an award from Bellin Health for his work with kids.

"It's so great to see them at first, maybe hiding in a corner and just watching, to the end of the day when they're out there kicking soccer balls and running," Torres said. "It's good to see them full of joy and confidence."

Torres can relate.

His family moved to Green Bay when he was 9, and he was a shy kid. "I was always afraid to join clubs or meet people," he said.

He always liked running and sports but was too intimidated to try out for a team until he entered East High School in Green Bay as a freshman.

"I decided to go for it," Torres said. "I just decided to do it, and I loved it."

He intended to play soccer, but he missed tryouts and went for cross-country running instead.

"Then my coach encouraged me to do track and field in spring," Torres said. "So I did."

"I would say running opened a lot of doors for me. I made new friends. I really, really liked it. It helped me with my confidence. I'm very, very grateful I did join."

Mike Welch, a volunteer and board member at Casa Alba Melanie, noted Torres is one of the first Green Bay area Hispanics to reach such a high level of achievement in sports.

"It was self-motivation that helped him with his achievements," Welch said. "And Armando humbly chose to help kids like himself."

"He will run with the slowest kid to cheer them on. Now we see how many are participating in the youth training group because of him."

Torres said he is proud of what the program has accomplished.

"When I see kids start to open up, it's an amazing thing," he said.

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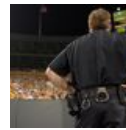
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