



## The Star-Ledger

### A sister's spirit takes wing

Scholarship honors her memory

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BY LORI FALCO  
For the Star-Ledger

Cristina Tolentino firmly believed in the value of an education. According to her brother, Mario, she said, "Every child should have an education so that they will be free."

When Cristina died in November 2005 from a rare form of cancer, Mario said he and his siblings wanted to "continue with her unfinished mission." With their sister's estate as seed money, they have established Cristina's Wings, a foundation dedicated to helping young people achieve their educational goals through scholarships and grants and furthering research into the disease that took her life at the age of 44.

"Her name and personality and character will live on because of this foundation," said Mario, who serves as its chairman and president. Cristina's Wings is supported by private donations.

The official launching of Cristina's Wings will take place at the Morris Museum in Morristown on Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

At the launch, the first Cristina's Wings scholarships will be awarded. The \$1,000 scholarships will go to four seniors from Morristown High School: Alex Wintz, Pedro Urday, and Andrew Cattano, all of Morristown, and Gradie Carroll of Morris Plains.

Wintz plays guitar in the Morristown High School Jazz Ensemble and plans to study jazz performance at the Berklee College of Music in Boston next fall.

Urday will be heading to Boston College and is considering a pre-med program, while Cattano will attend Montclair State University and plans to pursue a teacher certification in mathematics.

Inspired by her volunteer work with autistic students at the Allegro School in Cedar Knolls, Carroll plans to obtain a degree in special education and deaf education from Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania.

Born in the Philippines, Cristina Tolentino was one of nine children. She came to this country with her brother, Mario, and sister, Agnes, in 1981 and settled in Florham Park, later living in Lake Hiawatha and Morristown. Most of her siblings and her parents would eventually follow.

Upon her arrival, Cristina found a job as an executive secretary at Foster Wheeler in Livingston. She taught herself computer programming and went on to work at Prudential Insurance as a project manager.

She was diagnosed in 1998 with adenoid cystic carcinoma, an extremely rare form of cancer that can attack many different areas of the body, but most often occurs in the head and neck. Cristina experienced diminished speech, sight and equilibrium as the disease progressed.

"You see this loving person deteriorate before your eyes. That's what's so sad about this type of cancer," Mario said.

Morristown resident Michael Friel, a longtime friend of Cristina's, said, "She was a real class act." He noted that she was "a very good cook. She loved the idea of afternoon tea. She liked that dignified way of enjoying the afternoon."

When searching for a name for the new foundation, the family was reminded of an incident that occurred a month after Cristina died.

On a cold December day, her sister Agnes spotted a monarch butterfly in the kitchen of the Lake Hiawatha home that she and her husband had shared with Cristina. The unlikely appearance of a butterfly in mid-winter reminded Agnes of her sister's spirit.

"She did not know where it came from, she did not know where it went," he said. Agnes came to think of the butterfly as "Cristina's

Wings."

Scholarship winner Wintz will perform a guitar solo with the Morristown High School Jazz Quintet at the launch event. The High School String Ensemble will also perform, joined by scholarship winner Urday, who is a member of the group.

Donations to Cristina's Wings may be sent to First Morris Bank and Trust, 250 Madison Ave., Morristown, NJ 07960. There is a suggested donation of \$35 for the launch event at the museum. For further information about the launch, contact the museum at (973) 971-3743.

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# A beloved sister's spirit takes wing



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Mario Tolentino, left, with the first four Cristina's Wings scholarship winners from Morristown High School: Gradle Carroll, Pedro Urday and Andrew Cattano, standing, and Alex Wintz, seated.