

CFF SCHOLARSHIP PROVIDED MORE THAN FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR DEENA MORGAN

It was Senior Awards Night, May 1995, and Deena Morgan made her way on stage to accept Cypress Creek High School's awards for outstanding efforts in Spanish and Calculus. Then she was asked to stay.

In her short 18 years of life Deena had already endured great pain and seemingly insurmountable challenges brought on by a fight with Hodgkin's disease. She was diagnosed when she was in fifth grade at Matzke Elementary School and declared cancer-free one year later after a horrendous battle with chemotherapy.

That evening in May, her fierce determination to survive and dedication to her education were recognized. After a pause, she was presented with the Cy-Fair Educational Foundation's Cecil Hall Scholarship, which covered four years of college tuition expenses.

"Realizing at that moment that someone recognized me as a person they wanted to invest in was both humbling and inspiring," Deena said. "It made me want to make sure that I didn't let anyone down, and inspired me to continue to work hard and maximize every dollar that was invested in my education."

Deena had already made a name for herself at Cy-Creek High School.

She played on the freshman, junior varsity and varsity volleyball teams. The team won the state volleyball championship her junior year, and placed second the following year.

In addition to excelling at her studies, particularly math and science courses, Deena was a member of the National Honor Society and Mu Alpha Theta organization. She was active in Cypress Bible Church's youth group.

Deena said the CFEF scholarship opened up doors and opportunities for her. The Cecil Hall Scholarship was given only to students attending Texas A&M University, which she planned to do – and did. She graduated in 1999 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Mathematics.

"I am proud of my public school background in Cy-Fair ISD and equally proud of my public college education at Texas A&M," Deena said. "I have seen such a stigma attached to private high schools and colleges and couldn't beam with more pride that I am just as, if not more, successful than those my age with the 'premier' education. I am proud that CFEF rewards public school students and have come to place such immense respect on those that succeed with a background of public education and want to encourage the same."

Deena's success is evident – she is currently Vice President of Retail Strategy and Analytics for Reliant Energy, an NRG company.

The company hired her immediately after she graduated from Texas A&M, and tapped into her analytical expertise.

Deena initially got her feet wet as a junior analyst in Reliant Energy's quantitative group, where she developed option models for the company's gas and power traders. She said her education was invaluable.

"In all subsequent positions, I have focused on using quantitative approaches to drive key business decisions," she said. "I currently manage all strategy and analytic teams supporting the retail business."

Retail clients range from renters in one-bedroom apartments to large refineries on the Houston Ship Channel.

“The unique needs of each customer are wide in scope,” Deena said. “Actionable analysis is what I challenge all of my employees to bring to the table. I believe numbers and analytics tell a story, set a strategy and lead a company to ultimate success if channeled and applied in the right way.”

As a single, divorced mom, Deena devotes her time away from the office to her two sons. Preston is six years old and a Farney Elementary School student; Nathan is four years old and her morning travel companion as he attends Pre-Kindergarten classes at Trinity Lutheran School in downtown Houston.

She said she is an avid Indianapolis Colts football fan still in mourning from the team’s recent Super Bowl loss. She is a fitness devotee, and loves rose bush gardening, Broadway musicals, fine wine and curling up to read a good mystery novel.

“I recently moved back to Cypress from the Medical Center area in order to be closer to my parents so they can spend more time with my boys, as well as to put my boys in the Cy-Fair school district,” Deena said. “I am giddy and excited to learn how I can help give back to CFEF after it has given so much to me.”

“Being so blessed to have had the career success that I have had so far in my life, I look back at being awarded the Cecil Hall Scholarship as the catalyst that has led me here,” she said. “I place such a high value on education and therefore want to support organizations that share that same value.”

As for advice to Cy-Fair ISD’s future leaders, she advises a solid foundation in mathematics and science courses.

“I firmly believe that everything in life has derivations from these two practices,” Deena said.

And, she said, it is vital to seek out scholarship opportunities as you would employment.

“Presenting yourself in a unique and memorable way is critical,” Deena said. “Just as I look at applications for job seekers, those who are going to invest in your education need to see how you stand out from all of the other smart, ambitious students out there. Find ways to set yourself apart. Don’t be afraid to draw upon your personal experiences, even if they are hardships, to communicate what you have learned, how you will apply and how that experience in life has made you a stronger and better person.”

“Be creative yet true to who you are.”