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Motherless student gets help

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Staff / Alicia Lavender

Georgia Tech student Thuy Le, left, a Cross Keys High School graduate, talks with Students Without Mothers volunteer Adrienne Hollis last week over drinks at Starbucks in Dunwoody.

Chamblee resident Thuy Le has enrolled in classes at Georgia Tech, in part because of aid from the Tucker-based non-profit Students Without Mothers.

The organization provides \$4,000 scholarships for four years to students whose mothers have died or are absent through other circumstances. The group also pairs students with mentors who offer advice on any number of issues.

"We're paired up with a life coach we can talk to about anything, like boys or school," said Thuy.

"It's actually pretty helpful. I feel like I'm not alone as much anymore," she added.

Thuy, 17, graduated from Cross Keys High School in May.

Her family moved from Vietnam to Chamblee when she was 1 or 2, she said. Shortly after, her mother moved to California and took Thuy's younger sister but left her and brother Thanh behind.

When Thuy's father, who had a history of unstable behavior, left at the end of her junior year, Thuy and her brother used proceeds from after-school jobs to rent a room with friends. Thuy and her brother are now living separately, and she is living with a family friend, Tuyet Le.

"She's someone my dad knew and she was nice enough to take me," Thuy said.

Thuy worked through school at a nail salon, as a tutor and, more recently, as a paid intern at Emory University. For the last four years, she said her dream has been to attend Georgia Tech.

"I chose Georgia Tech back in the ninth grade. It just really appealed to me because of its math program," she said.

Thuy said she plans to use her biomedical engineering degree to design and sell prosthetics.

"I really wanted to do prosthetics. It's math and science put together, and prosthetics help people who feel like maybe they're not normal or how they used to be. Prosthetics help them get that back," she said.

Students Without Mothers is run by a nine-member volunteer board. Founded in 2004, it has offered aid to more than 40 students, said founding board member and volunteer Adrienne Hollis.

The group receives its funding through private donations, corporate sponsorships and an annual fund-raiser.

Ms. Hollis, a Monroe resident, said at the time friend Mary Torrence founded the organization, "I was a single parent... it had never occurred to me what would happen to my child if something happened to me.

"There is not an organization I've volunteered with that has been as fulfilling. The most difficult thing every year is turning away students just because we don't have the money," she added.

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