CHRISTOPHER NAVAS LEAVES QUEENS COLLEGE—AND A DECADE IN MANUAL LABOR—AS A SALK SCHOLAR BOUND FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL

--From High School Drop-Out to Honors College Graduate to Dartmouth Medical School--

FLUSHING, NY, May 21, 2012—What a difference a day makes! When high school dropout Christopher Navas, who had been raised by a single mother on welfare and moved six times before he was 18, enrolled at Queens College in 2007, he had little more than a passing idea of what he wanted to do with his life. His interests leaned towards being either a gym teacher or a physical therapist—and then, one day, psychology instructor Giuseppe Cataldo took Navas’ class on a tour of a QC laboratory conducting pain research. Navas was so fascinated that he approached Cataldo to ask how he could get involved. A position as an undergraduate researcher and acceptance into an honors neuroscience program soon followed. All the while, Navas continued working his full-time job at a commercial boiler manufacturer.

Today, Navas is a Salk Scholar who will graduate with an honors BA in neuroscience from Queens College this month and enter the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth in the fall. “I’m the luckiest person in the world,” he says. “At Queens College I was surrounded by intelligent, driven people—both classmates and professors—and benefited from great advice that helped me make the right decisions.” Navas, who now resides in Great Neck, credits Cataldo with inspiring him to explore the field of neuroscience. “He radiated such energy that the entire class was fascinated and motivated. I wanted to be involved in the field just as much as he was.” Perhaps they related so well because Cataldo, too, had made a living with his hands, working as a shoemaker in his father’s shop when he wasn’t in school—an occupation that Cataldo was expected to continue.

Despite his responsibility forming new boilers from sheet steel for the boiler company, Navas maintained a high GPA, presented work at the Society for Neuroscience’s annual convention, and helped two graduate neuroscience students as an assistant researcher. Of these challenging circumstances he remarks, “Once you find what you want to do in life, you’ll make the sacrifices you need to.”

Navas also became a certified EMT and volunteered at his local fire department and the Manhasset North Shore Hospital emergency room so that he could experience the world of

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health care firsthand. The doctor he admired most was a cardiologist who carried his own chair and a cartoon diagram of a heart into cubicle consultations so that he could make patients and their families feel as comfortable as possible as he addressed all of their concerns. “That’s the kind of doctor I want to be,” says Navas.

The Jonas Salk scholarship is awarded annually to eight graduates from the senior colleges of the City University of New York who have been accepted to a U.S. medical school and have performed scientific research as an undergraduate. Students are selected for their potential to make significant contributions to medical research. Says Giuseppe Cataldo, who now holds a PhD in Neuropsychology, “Chris’s passion for neuroscience was obvious to everyone around him—he was like a kid in a candy store. I’m so grateful to have been an early, positive influence on him and know that he continued his studies to achieve this kind of success.”

Queens College of the City University of New York (CUNY), founded in 1937, is dedicated to the idea that a first-rate education should be accessible to talented individuals of all backgrounds and financial means. Its more than 20,000 students come from over 150 nations and speak scores of languages, creating an extraordinarily diverse and welcoming environment. Located on a beautiful, 77-acre campus in Flushing, Queens College enjoys a national reputation for its liberal arts and sciences and pre-professional programs. Each year Queens College has been cited by The Princeton Review as one of the nation’s 100 “Best Value” colleges, thanks to its outstanding academics, generous financial aid packages, and relatively low costs. The college opened its first residence hall in August 2009. More info on Queens College at www.qc.cuny.edu.

Christopher Navas – May 2012