

The Rob Vega Memorial Scholarship



THE PMAHCC FOUNDATION

A Life Well Lived

Robert Vega dreamt, aspired and achieved. But he also was careful to see that those around him did the same.

“He was always helping – not only for his brothers, but for everybody else,” his mother, Maria Elena Vega, said. “I remember him telling me, ‘I want Anthony [his younger brother] to be better than me.’ He wanted to go to law school and everything, but he was always first caring about them.”

Rob – the eldest son of a Puerto Rican-born father and Costa Rican mother whose struggle to achieve the American Dream he sought to preserve and emulate by practicing immigration law – died in July following a rafting accident in a state park near the University of Pittsburgh, where he planned to pursue his law degree. He was 22. In a subsequent newspaper obituary, friends memorialized him as the type of achiever who would’ve grown up to be elected president.

Even from a young age in suburban Connecticut and, later, Pennsylvania’s Lancaster County, Rob was gifted and multi-talented, those closest to him remembered. He was multi-lingual, had a knack as a child for drawing and, in his teen years, took great pride in the most specific of things, like his penmanship.

Above all, he knew how to connect with people, his bond with his nuclear family was incredibly strong, and he was a bright kid with an even brighter future.

Rob, who recruited students to attend Pitt and interned under Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, graduated cum laude from the University of Pittsburgh in April, with a double major in psychology and political science. He planned to attend Pitt’s law school in the fall.

His fateful trip to Ohiopyle State Park in Fayette County this summer was his first rafting trip.

His life in Pittsburgh, when he moved after graduating J.P. McCaskey High School in Lancaster County, didn’t have a textbook start. It was tough for Rob to be separated from the people with whom he had spent the vast majority of his first 18 years.

“He moved to Pittsburgh and he called, like the next day, saying, ‘You know what, Ma, I can’t be away from home,’” his mother said. “[He said] ‘even if some day I get married, I want to live close to you.’ That was the first time we were separated. And that really hit him.”

At Pitt, despite longing for his family, Rob excelled. Professor Kathryn Monahan taught him in an upper-level psychology class – Child Development And The Law – in his third year at school.

“There are many kids who fade into the background – he was not one of them; he was an all-star from the start,” his professor said. “He talked every discussion period. He just showed independence beyond his years. He was a great thinker and would have been a great lawyer.”

To Peter Morgan, Rob was first and foremost a great friend.

The two met when they were in the seventh grade – they had both world cultures and mathematics classes together – and, in Peter’s words, “ended up best friends then and there.”

“We clicked,” Peter laughed. “We were real good friends. We did everything together.”

He means everything, he joked. Peter, born color-blind, would text or e-mail Rob pictures of clothing he was thinking of buying so Rob could help him make educated decisions. When he traveled to his native Egypt, he always brought home Rob a gift.

“You don’t do that with every friend,” he said.

While Rob looked up to his family – especially his younger brothers – Peter said it was incredibly easy to get sucked into his orbit.

“He just graduated school; he wanted to go to law school,” Peter said. “I was like, ‘Hey, buddy, I’m gonna work for you one day.’”

“Being around him,” he said, “made you want to do better.”

SCHOLARSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

The Rob Vega Memorial Scholarship [\$5000.00] will be awarded to Law School Students who display the same Academic, Familial and Civic qualities that Rob did.

Applicants must have at least one parent of Hispanic ancestry (at least one of applicant's grandparents must be Hispanic), have a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher, and reside in Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Westmoreland or Washington County.

Applicants must currently be attending or have been accepted into an accredited School of Law. Preference will be given to students who are currently attending or have been accepted into the University of Pittsburgh School of Law or the Duquesne University School of Law.

The ideal candidate is someone who plans to practice of law will focus on public interest work and has demonstrated a commitment to stay in the Pittsburgh area.