

## **Garden Club of Cape Coral Awards 2021 Merit Scholarships**

Four Cape Coral high school seniors were recently granted a total of \$ 4,800 by the Garden Club of Cape Coral (GCCC) through their Merit Scholarship Awards, which is given annually to local students who excel academically and in their environmental efforts as active members in our community.

The tenth annual awards in memory of club co-founder Marty Ward were granted to Kayla Hoagland of Oasis High School, Julia Lin of Cape Coral High School, and Morgan Russell of Mariner High School. They stood out from the rest of applicants because of their academic achievements, community involvement and commitment to continue through their careers with their efforts in conserving our precious environment for the future.

Also a recently established award in memory of Donna Conway, funded by the Conway family and friends in 2020, was presented to Sarah Jiang of Cape Coral High School. Donna Conway was a long-time member of the club who initiated the club's main fundraiser March in the Park, held annually since 2009. Jiang also was awarded due to her stellar academic performance and commitment to conserving the environment.

Thanks to the precious support of club members and the community, forty-five awards ranging in value from \$250 to \$1250 have been presented to graduating seniors since the program was established a decade ago. The value of the awards is determined by the relevance of each student's course of study, extracurricular activities, community involvement and future career goals.

Besides being a senior and a Cape Coral resident, applicants must present two references, academic history, active participation in horticultural or environmental projects and a 250-word personal statement. Applications open in January, with submission deadline in February, award notifications in March and presentations usually at the GCCC April meeting.

Club meetings are currently suspended. GCCC meets on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of September through May at 6:00 pm at Kiwanis Hall, 360 Santa Barbara Blvd. Guests are welcome. Website: [www.gardenclubofcapecoral.com](http://www.gardenclubofcapecoral.com)

### **Meet the 2021 Awarded Graduating Seniors:**

**Kayla Hoagland**, 18. After graduating from Oasis High School, Hoagland will start this fall studying Mechanical Engineering at the University of South Florida. Her unquenchable interest in exploring how things are built explains her career choice. Spending two summers as a junior counselor at the Rotary Park Nature Exploration Camp is only part of her long list of commitments in our community. She is particularly proud of Paul the pelican, the main character of the pop-up children's book she has conceived as part of a group project to raise awareness about the use of non-renewable resources. "I believe no animal should be put in harms' way due to human error and carelessness," notes Hoagland. Pollution and waste are her main environmental concerns.

**Julia Lin**, 18. The University of Florida is her next stop this fall after graduating from Cape Coral High School. Lin wants to study Biology and Business Administration, and then obtain a Pharmacy degree since her dream is to open a pharmacy in a rural community with a high density of seniors, "to ensure the ease of medicine is available to people without insurance," explains Lin. Honoring her Chinese heritage, Lin wants to put emphasis on the healing power of herbal medicine. "I want to wear a white coat as my

cape and make the world a better place, one patient at a time.” In the meantime, and concerned about universal access to potable drinking water, Lin has been raising funds for the non-profit organization Thirst Project, based in Los Angeles and present in communities around the world.

**Morgan Russell**, 18. There is no time to lose for Russell. That’s why, right after graduating from Mariner High School, she wants to start this summer studying Environmental Engineering at the University of Florida. “I am a life-long learner whose thirst for knowledge can only be satisfied with discovering and learning new things every day,” explains Russell. Following the steps of her father, who works as a scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), her main concerns are climate change and the current state of the environment. “I want to be part of the process to heal the Earth before it is too late.”

**Sarah Jiang**, 17. Choosing a university was easy for Jiang. After learning that the University of Missouri in Kansas City offers a direct pass to their own graduates to enroll in their medical school, Jiang decided to apply to earn a major in Biology and a minor in Chemistry. Jiang has already spent plenty of time in a university lab while finishing her final two years at Cape Coral High School. Concerned about the water quality in Southwest Florida, when red tide and blue-green algae affected our local waters in 2018, Jiang started volunteering and then obtained an internship as research assistant in the chemistry department at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). Part of her job was collecting samples and analyzing the presence of undesirable chemicals, mainly derived from pharmaceutical and agricultural industries. Jiang affirms that her hope is “to spur change in the regulation of these chemicals in our local water sources.”

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