

Brighton Park Student Overcomes Obstacles to become First-Generation College Graduate

By Justin Breen
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Lands credit analyst job with Wintrust and plans to help pay her parents' mortgage

Grecia Armenta can't wait to write a check to help pay for her parents' mortgage.

The Brighton Park resident and soon-to-be graduate from University of Illinois at Chicago will start a full-time job as a Credit Analyst with Wintrust in July. A good portion of her first check will go to assist with the mortgage payment of her parents' home – and where Armenta currently lives as well.

"I'm eternally grateful to them," Armenta said. "I've never wanted to disappoint my parents and always wanted to graduate from college. That's my motivation."



Armenta, whose parents – Aurora and Leopoldo – are originally from Mexico, is one of five siblings and will be the first to graduate from college.

Armenta gave hearty thanks to Bottom Line, a nonprofit that helps low-income and first-generation students attend and graduate from college. Bottom Line helped Armenta balance her time while she took classes and commuted to her Southwest Side home. The organization also helped her secure an internship with Wintrust, which has led to the full-time job upon graduation.

"Bottom Line has definitely kept me on track," Armenta said. "They've helped me every month I've been in college, keeping me organized and introducing me to a lot of career paths."

Founded in Boston 20 years ago, Bottom Line's Chicago office opened nearly four years ago and the students in the program have a college persistence rate of over 90 percent. This year the program is serving more than 1,000 students in Chicago, with a wait list of 500 students. This will be the first year that the Bottom Line office in Chicago will have a graduating class.

"I, and the entire Bottom Line team, are excited to celebrate Grecia as one of Bottom Line Chicago's first class of graduates," said Bottom Line Success Team Manager Hannah Lee.

“Grecia and I worked together over the years to explore what careers would be a good fit for her strengths and interests, so we are excited that her work at Wintrust has led to a full-time opportunity.”

Armenta said she’s been inspired by her parents, especially her mother, who has dealt with breast and ovarian cancer. Since she was 16, Armenta, who is now 22, has driven her mom to hospitals for treatment. All the while, she’s watched her mother work in the housekeeping department of a major hotel chain.

“A lot of bad things have come her way,” Armenta said. “But she’s always pushing through. If she can overcome things and still push through, I’m pretty sure I can do the same.”

Aurora said she’s proud of her daughter’s “tenacity and willingness to strive and come out on top, despite the problems we’ve faced at home, whether it be financial, emotional or physical.” “She knew how to overcome all the obstacles that came her way,” Aurora said.



Armenta, a marketing major, has a large scholarship through UIC’s Presidents Award Program – dubbed the “most prestigious scholarship” at the school. She has been motivated to excel in school by her own high standards, but also from watching many of her friends drop out of college after only

a year or two.

“To see that I’m going to actually graduate in four years, it makes me feel very proud of myself,” Armenta said. “It’s been a lot of hard work, and I know that there’s always room for improvement. And I don’t ever let myself fall back.”

For more information on Bottom Line in Chicago, visit <https://www.bottomline.org/content/chicago>