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Cuauhtemoc

As a teenager, Mountain View resident Cuauhtemoc appeared to be sliding into the same life as his three older brothers, who never graduated from high school. With poor grades and a listless attitude about education, Cuauhtemoc lacked direction and had no clear plans for his future.

But just take a look at the 21-year-old today. A student at Mission College in Santa Clara, he is preparing to become a web programmer and works part-time as a tutor in an after-school program for elementary school students.

He credits the attitude change to mentoring and support he received from a summer job with the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce—an opportunity made possible by the NOVA Youth Employment program.

Starting out as an office assistant, Cuauhtemoc recalled that he “learned a lot of skills, stuff that might seem

pretty basic, like making copies, phone etiquette, and taking messages.” He took on higher-level duties too, contacting local businesses to interest them in joining the Chamber and using his self-taught computer skills to update the organization’s website.

After that, Cuauhtemoc assumed another duty—being part of the team that kept things moving smoothly during the city’s annual Mountain View Art and Wine Festival. Working that high-profile fundraising event further honed his organizing and communications skills.

One of the most memorable parts of the summer involved a chamber member, mortgage broker Lisa Epstein, who diligently mentored Cuauhtemoc. She

helped him explore different career options, learn how to network with business professionals, and prepare for job interviews.

“He has a tenacious spirit,” Epstein said of Cuauhtemoc. “He wants to get somewhere and do better in the future than he has in the past.”

The unwavering encouragement from Epstein was a huge influence on Cuauhtemoc, who had to balance his life goals with helping support his parents and a brother, with whom he lives. He used some of his salary to help his family pay the rent.

But, he said, Epstein urged him to reach beyond his current circumstances and dream big.

“I had wanted to earn an associate’s degree. She pushed me to get a four-year bachelor’s degree or even a master’s,” Cuauhtemoc said. “She had confidence in me and persuaded me to do different things. She would always be there for me, and that really helped a lot.”