

## **Georgie Smigel Group Real Estate Scholarship**

Living in Cranberry Township has been a transformative experience that has deeply impacted my life. When I arrived in Pennsylvania from Venezuela two and a half years ago, I was filled with nervousness and uncertainty. I clearly remember the moment I saw the sign welcoming us to the state. As we approached, the landscape became more beautiful, and something inside me made me feel at home. Despite the mix of emotions, I thought, “Maybe one day, this place could be my home.” Today, with a heart full of gratitude, I can confidently say that it is.

One of the main reasons I love living here is the genuine support from the people around me. When we arrived, my family was starting over, with nothing more than the clothes in our suitcases. I will always remember how the community reached out to us. Several neighbors organized to donate furniture, beds, and kitchen utensils—all the essentials to help us begin. But beyond the material support, what truly touched us was the sense of not being alone. We knew there were people who, despite not knowing us well, genuinely cared about our well-being.

As time passed, I also found support at my school, Seneca Valley. At first, I relied on a translator to communicate, but little by little, thanks to the patience of my teachers and friends, I began to gain confidence. Miss Miller has been a fundamental pillar in my life. Not only did she guide me academically, but she was also there when I needed advice or emotional support. I always knew I could count on her. Though she was serious, her kindness made me feel as though I had lived here my whole life, even when I was just beginning to adapt. Her words helped me keep going, especially when things got tough. She would remind me that everything passes, to live one day at a time, and not to worry about what I couldn’t control. Those words have stayed with me.

Another reason I feel so connected to this place is how my family has embraced local traditions. We now celebrate Thanksgiving and Easter with enthusiasm, and my mom enjoys buying decorations and planning meals. These small moments have strengthened our bond with the community and helped us feel part of something greater.

Cranberry Township is not just a place where I live; it has become a home that has grown with me. The people, my school, and the new traditions have created a sense of belonging that I never imagined I would experience when I first saw that sign. Today, I know that wherever life takes me, I will carry with me the values of empathy, hope, and community that this place has taught me.

**But why do I truly love living in my community?**

Because, despite leaving behind everything—my family, my home, my friends, my neighbors, and all the places that held my memories—this place gave me the opportunity to start anew. Despite feeling alone, sad, frustrated, and overwhelmed by leaving everything I knew and coming to a completely different place where I didn't even speak the language, they welcomed me. They gave me the chance to have a new home, where I could grow—not just me, but my family as well.