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Editorial

Reaching for the stars

Stockton's Jose Hernandez, an astronaut in training, provides an inspiring example for 2005 graduates

Thousands of San Joaquin, Calaveras and Amador county students are graduating from high school this spring.

Their lives are full of hope, promise, opportunity and uncertainty.

They're making important decisions about the future - some to continue their education, others to begin careers.

If they need any inspiration, the life of Jose Hernandez provides an ideal model.

The Franklin High School and University of the Pacific graduate is one of the nation's astronauts in training, living in Houston and realizing his own version of the American dream.

His is a story of hard work, determination and the positive power of family love and support.

Hernandez studied hard at Franklin and made good grades. Just as importantly, he recognized opportunity when it came his way and seized it.

He listened to others.

When a high school counselor suggested Pacific's Community Involvement Program, which has provided opportunities for disadvantaged minority students from low-income families, Hernandez discovered his avenue to a higher education.

When he struggled with a computer-programming class in college, Hernandez took advantage of a campus tutoring program.

He also listened to his parents.

The Hernandezes' story also provides an example for parents. Salvador and Julia Hernandez provided the kind of support and encouragement every child deserves.

When children dream of who they want to be, moms and dads should be their first and biggest supporters. Salvador and Julia Hernandez helped direct their youngest son toward academic achievement.

Jose Hernandez is an inspiration because he didn't have every advantage and wasn't a perfect student.

He's like everyone - overcoming obstacles, working through problems, learning from mistakes, being willing to take chances.

His life hasn't been simple or easy. Hernandez has just used the ordinary to achieve the extraordinary.

His family is rooted in La Piedad, Mexico, a city the size of Lodi on the central plateau of Michoacan, and in San Joaquin County fields, where he, his parents and three siblings picked crops seasonally.

Hernandez paid attention in class, excelled in the sciences and math, made the honor roll and took advantage of the opportunity when a college education was made possible.

At 42, he's still a student. He's still in training.

The mission this time is space exploration and the program is the most elite in the country, if not the world.

Hernandez is one of 100 astronauts or candidates who are part of NASA's space-shuttle program. It will take another four or five years of training for him to realize his chance to reach the stars.

That's hardly intimidating. He's been patient and willing to earn for his rewards.

Whether he ultimately makes it to space or not, Hernandez provides this year's graduates an inspiring example of what can be accomplished when you're willing to devote yourself to your studies and are dedicated and prepared to do the hard work it takes to achieve the highest success.

His parents provide an equally important lesson.

Don't hesitate to challenge your children to reach for the stars. They just might make it.