

2016 CSDFEA Larry Itliong Scholarship Award Program: Essay Contest
Submitted By: Leiana Talo Lepule

Larry Itliong was born into a large family in the Pangasinan province, and migrated to settle in the United States. His efforts as an influential character in labor movements started early during his time in the U.S. as he became more involved in labor strikes and unions. Mr. Itliong is recognized for his work during and after World War II as a steward's assistant and a leader in an abundance of labor movements for the demand of minimum wage and improved conditions in the work environment. With his work involving the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the early collaboration with National Farm Workers Association led by César Chávez, Mr. Itliong made his mark on the improved lives of Filipino-American laborers. The major components of his work are seen in the farm labor movement and the work of U.S. unions. This work significantly impacts the world I live in today and the future as a Filipina-American.

My great-grandparents are from the province of Cavite. They moved to the U.S. in 1965 for the similar purpose of leading new and improved lives. Mr. Itliong's work has provided my family, past and present, the possibility to work and prosper in a society and economy that is constantly changing. This impacted the work life of everyone from my great-grandparents to my mother; then, ultimately my life. Both of my great-grandfathers, as well as my grandfather, served in the U.S. Navy, while my great-grandmothers and grandmother worked in factories. During their early years in the U.S., they endured the challenges of supporting the family with the fruits of their labor. My mother has also benefitted from Mr. Itliong's efforts, by having the opportunity for higher education and a longtime career with the County of San Diego.

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On a broader perspective, recently recognizing Mr. Itliong for his work sheds light on the impact he has on the world I live in today and on the Filipino-America population in the U.S. For instance, Itliong's work opens up our minds to the possibility of having such a dynamic influence on the society and economy as he did in the labor movements of the early to mid-1900s. The world I live in has more opportunities and challenges for Filipino-American youth, and other ethnic groups, to accomplish in their lifetimes, including the efforts to make our mark on society in our desired occupations and future goals. The work that Mr. Itliong accomplished in his lifetime serves as the early foundation of how Filipino-Americans continue to establish themselves in American society today and the future. As such, my goal is to become a school teacher so that I may provide and pay forward these same opportunities to youth of all backgrounds in the U.S. The experiences and efforts of my family, both in the past and the present, are what motivate me to strive for something higher in both my education and in a society in which the Filipino-American community continues to expand off of the early work of Mr. Itliong.