or Angelo Gallegos, a Denver native, it was hard to envision a path to university and beyond. Growing up, there were no “real life examples,” he says, no college-experienced family and friends.

Today, Gallegos is 31 and a graduate of University of Colorado Denver—the first in his family not just to graduate, but to attend, college. He did it with hard work, persistence, and support from the Reisher Scholars Program, a need- and merit-based scholarship that helps promising Colorado students earn an undergraduate degree.

Rooted in the belief that educational attainment creates great opportunity, the Reisher Scholars Program works to graduate students on time so they can begin their careers and give back to their communities. Unlike most scholarship programs, it focuses on university sophomores and community college transfer students who demonstrate academic promise and leadership potential.

Gallegos, a graduate of Iver C. Ranum High School in Adams County, fit the Reisher Scholar profile. As a student at Community College of Denver, he’d become more exploratory and curious about pursuing a four-year degree. A mentor at CU’s Educational Opportunity Programs, which provides underrepresented students with “vital links to the culturally rich and diverse” community of Denver, encouraged him to go further with his studies.

Gallegos joined the Reisher Scholars Program as a transfer student in 2013. All of his expenses were covered until 2015, when he graduated with a degree in international studies.

The Reisher Scholars Program was established by Roger and Margaret Reisher, who, like Gallegos, came from modest means and were the first in their families to attend and graduate from college. Roger later established FirstBank, the largest privately owned banking corporation in Colorado. In appreciation of education’s impact on their lives, the Reishers established the Reisher Scholars Program in 2001. The Denver Foundation has been proud to steward the program for the past 15 years.

“As I’ve talked with Reisher Scholars and our partner institutions across the state, I am moved by the extent to which this program is truly changing lives,” says Christine Márquez-Hudson, The Denver Foundation’s CEO and President. “At this critical point in our history, with college costs rising, it is even more important for programs like Reisher to support students through graduation.”

The primary goal of the Reisher Scholars Program is to reduce the financial burden on scholars so they can complete their degrees on time, without incurring additional educational debt. Bolstered by the Reisher Program’s cohort model as well as mentorship, workshops, and graduation...
planning, Reisher Scholars graduate on time at a rate of 62 percent. By contrast, across Colorado public universities, only about 33 percent of students graduate within four years.

Since the program’s inception in 2001, the 1,250 Reisher Scholars have included many adult learners, single mothers, first-generation college students, and veterans. Many attended school while caring for families of their own and working full time.

Angelo Gallegos is thankful for the mentorship he received as a Reisher Scholar. He’s gone on to tutor ESL, support the Urban Male Initiative at CCD, and become a mentor himself, serving as a career trainer at Mi Casa Resource Center. Many of the people he works with are women between the ages of 25 and 40 who are raising families, seeking new career opportunities, and sometimes lifting themselves out of poverty. Like Gallegos, few have real-life examples of what success looks like despite many hurdles to overcome.

“Their strength, their tenacity, and their ability to overcome obstacles inspire me,” he says. “They jump leaps and bounds to sustain themselves and further their careers. They are a reflection of who I am, who I was 12 years ago.”

By 2025, there could be upwards of 3,000 Reisher Scholars joining Gallegos in the workforce and working toward their degrees. These scholars may go on to invent things, advocate for social justice, and give back. They are the future engineers, artists, doctors, teachers, economists, and business people of our community, united by gratitude for the program that allowed them to transcend income brackets, cultivate leadership skills, and fulfill their college dreams.

For information on the Reisher Scholars Program, visit www.reisherscholars.org.

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.
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I’m originally from Colorado Springs. I was born there, but left by the age of two because my father was in the Army. After high school graduation, I also joined the military and spent nine years in the US Navy. After two deployments, I decided to go after what makes me happy: writing and being creative.

HOW DID RECEIVING THE REISHER SCHOLARSHIP IMPACT YOU?
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The Reisher Scholars Program taught me to run after my goals. Simply put, I learned that the only thing standing in the way of my success was my own fear of failure. A team of encouraging staff and volunteers helped me find my path from the unforgettable stressors of war to a place of academic success.

Giving back to my community has always been a huge part of who I am. I believe serving others isn’t necessarily taught but rather planted inside of us. Programs like Reisher help us to grow. I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to be around others who have a heart for not only serving our community but also serving each other.

Today, I am most proud of completing a four-year degree a year early, being debt-free, and maintaining straight A’s all throughout my college career.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW THAT YOU HAVE GRADUATED?
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I work for Hill Communications Group, where I interned during school. This organization has pushed and pulled me in directions I didn’t think I could ever go. For once in my life I don’t feel like I am working! I am able to reflect on my own growth and set new goals for myself.