

# Scholarship opened doors for engineer Parra

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *The following story is the second in a series about past recipients of Maddox scholarships.*

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NEWS-SUN

Ben Parra originally entered Stanford University as a pre-med student. He completed most of his requirements during his freshman year, but then he met statistics and dynamics.

"I soon decided structural engineering was my passion," he wrote to the News-Sun.

Parra is the 2004 Maddox Foundation Distinguished Scholar.

The Maddox Foundation Distinguished Scholar scholarship provides one full-ride scholarship for a Lea County student to attend the university of their choice.

The Maddox Distinguished



Parra



Scholarship is awarded in July prior to the students' senior year.

Recipients have attended Notre Dame, Baylor, Stanford and Brown, among others.

Parra graduated from Stanford with

a bachelor's degree in civil and environmental engineering in June 2009 and completed a master's degree in structural engineering and geomechanics last month.

Parra now works as a structural designer for Parsons Brinckerhoff in Virginia Beach.

As a structural engineer, Parra will help design systems such as beams, columns, braces, floor systems, roofs, foundations and facades.

Part of the design process includes

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"detailed mathematical models of structures so we can analyze them for critical loading and fatigues," he explained.

Parra credited his background in math and biology to giving him a solid foundation for Stanford.

The school, located in California, was an adjustment for the Hobbsan.

"Moving out to Stanford was a big change for me in terms of getting used to a large city," he said. "I had to get used to the traffic and the fast-paced lifestyle of larger cities.

"It was also a huge cultural shock for me," he added. "The (San Francisco) Bay Area is extremely diverse and with that comes a vast number of ideologies

and customs that I had never seen before and had to get used to having around and experiencing every day."

Along with the adjustment to living near San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland, Parra said he went through an adjustment period with academics as well.

"Not a lot of students my freshman year felt like they were prepared ... even those that came from the best private schools in the nation," he said.

Stanford operates on a quarter system with three 11-week quarters per academic year.

Parra said the classes move quickly and "we basically learn a normal semester's worth of material in 11 weeks."

Stanford was "extremely challenging" and Parra said the school "would have been equally as challenging regardless

of what high school I came from."

If not for the Maddox Foundation scholarship, Parra said he would not have attended an Ivy League school.

"It opened up my college opportunities," he said.

The education at Stanford gave Parra the opportunity to pursue a career with a world class design and construction firm, he said.

Parra still returns to Hobbs to visit his father during major holidays and for a week or two every year.

He said growing up in Lea County kept him grounded.

"Some things I have learned ... were to never forget where one comes from and that hard work always pays off, whether the rewards are tangible or not," he said.