

Community college students give back to the community

Many are involved in outreach and charitable projects.

BY KORI LEE GARNER



November/
December 2006

Community service is not an activity that immediately comes to mind when people think about their local community college. But many South Orange County Community College District students are involved in a multitude of outreach and charitable projects in addition to their academic studies and athletic endeavors. Four local women, currently studying at either Saddleback College or Irvine Valley College, are excellent examples of this need to “give back,” adding these activities to their already busy, productive lives.

Saddleback College's Jennifer Gamez Whitten and Julia Caro

“Community college students get so much and have so much,” says Saddleback College interior design student Jennifer Gamez Whitten. “Many of us believe that because we’ve received so much from the community, we must give back to the community as well. I’m very proud to be part of a program that assists abused

women and children sheltered at Human Options.”



Jennifer Gamez Whitten, Saddleback College, Interior Design Club

Jennifer is the current President of the Saddleback College Interior Design Club. Together with Vice-President Julia Caro, they and fellow Interior Design Club members participate in joint projects with the Orange County Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) that includes fundraising in support of the ASID/OC Community Service Project at Human Options.

Julia, who held a variety of exciting jobs (including a stint riding horses for Joan Irvine Smith) before finding her passion in Saddleback College’s innovative interior design certificate program, says, “We become more empowered as we help other women become empowered. It’s important for women to support each other.”

Jennifer and Julia were both recently recognized for their exemplary academic achievements and service to the community by ASID/OC. They were each honored with ASID’s Outstanding Academic Achievement Award in September. “It was

Continued on following page:
Irvine Valley College’s Selena Tan and Christine Park



Julia Caro, Saddleback College, Interior Design Club

the best birthday present ever!” laughs Julia, who was celebrating a milestone event when she was given the news of her award.

Community college students give back to the community

(Continued from previous page)



November/
December 2006

Irvine Valley College's Selena Tan and Christine Park

At Irvine Valley College, Selena Tan and Christine Park are hardworking, award-winning Service Co-Chairs of the Alpha Omega Mu Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa (Phi Theta Kappa [PTK] is the largest honor society in American higher education.) Both women are passionate advocates of service to the community and believe inspiration comes from the heart. "Anyone can serve," says Selena, "it's about having the willingness to put yourself out there." Both women also agree that "giving back" helps the giver much more than the person on the receiving end of any outreach effort.

Recently back in Orange County after years of living in Singapore, Selena is a Psychology major at Irvine Valley College who plans to transfer to UCLA. No stranger to philanthropic projects, she was involved with Circle K prior to joining PTK and learned quickly how deceptive the apparent affluence was in Orange County. "Most people don't realize how large the need is," she says. "I was so impressed by our program with Orangewood Children's Home. The children are grateful for any attention we give them. I'm looking forward to future PTK partnerships with Orangewood on their behalf."

Selena's co-chair, Christine Park, Biology major, is a recent arrival from Arizona. She moved to Irvine to be closer to her parents

34 today's woman of south orange county



Selena Tan, Irvine Valley College, Phi Theta Kappa

to Peace" project that provides medical aid and education to children in Sri Lanka. Christine says, "It is a privilege to work with the good, talented people of PTK. It's the best energy booster!"

Like their counterparts at Saddleback College, both Selena and Christine have recently been honored for their academic leadership and service to the community. Christine is the recipient of a Coca-Cola Foundation Scholarship and Selena was named a Phi Theta Kappa Leader of Promise. **tw**

and eventually plans to transfer to UCLA to study dentistry. A vice-president of her high school honor society, a friend introduced her to Phi Theta Kappa. She is excited by the passion and spirit she encountered working on PTK projects, such as the upcoming "Give and Go Day," that will provide medical supplies and used cell phones to S.O.S. (Share Our Selves) in Costa Mesa. She is also working on the national PTK "Bridge



Christine Park, Irvine Valley College, Phi Theta Kappa

There are many clubs and organizations at both Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College that are committed to scholarship and community service. Log onto www.saddleback.edu or www.ivc.edu. For more information on this article, please contact the author at kgarner@socccd.org.