Student's Award Honors Persistence, Achievement

Dear Friends,

Like a coin, there are two sides to our life at the University of California, Riverside. They are, of course, inextricably linked. One cannot exist without the other.

One side, which often captures our thoughts and discussions, is the challenges faced by our students, faculty, staff and parents to enter, persist and blossom in our creative environment.

The other side of the coin can at times be obscured, but it is enormously powerful and important - and the driving force for me and so many others. This side is the one of opportunity, promise, and achievement. It is the focus of today's letter.

And while I tell the story of Pricila Chavez Lara, I know similar stories can be told at UCR thousands of times over, simply with different names and details.

Karen and I, along with several hundred members of the Citizens University Committee who honored Pricila last week, had a chance to meet her and her family. She was there to be recognized for her accomplishments. As she was introduced and gave her presentation, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

Pricila has been captured by music, embraced and encouraged by her family, and inspired by teachers along the way.

In her own words: "All I can say is that UCR has been such a blessing to my life... It has been a year here since I transferred ... Thank you UCR for this warm embrace. For watering and feeding the plants that make this world a more bearable place. Thank you for paving the road and making this a great nation of true opportunity."

Pricila was an infant when her parents bought her first guitar. By age 4 she was learning to play the accordion. By age 10 she played piano, accordion, drums and tenor saxophone. Last year at age 21 she began taking violin and cello lessons at UCR.

Born in Baja, Mexico, Pricila moved with her family to the United States as a preschooler. She is the first in her family to complete middle school, let alone high school and now attend college.

She has performed in concert with the UCR Chamber Music Ensembles and our Jazz Ensemble. She has a 4.0 grade point average and plans to pursue orchestral conducting in graduate school and as a career.

A full-time student, Pricila also works three part-time jobs to supplement the financial need-based grants she receives.

She is a mentor to students in science, technology, engineering and math at Mt. San Jacinto Community College (which she attended as a freshman before transferring to UCR). She gives private piano and guitar lessons, and is a part-time real estate agent. She also is the youth choir director and pianist at her family church.

This year she received the prestigious Presser Foundation award, which carries a $4,800 scholarship, and is presented annually to outstanding music majors in undergraduate music schools at select U.S. universities.

Rather than use the scholarship money for herself, Pricila started a community youth orchestra in nearby Hemet so she can share her love of classical music with disadvantaged youth and hone her conducting skills.

Again, in her words: "On August 20th I launched my first meeting of my youth orchestra. Although we only had 6 members the first day, by our third meeting there were 15 and almost didn't fit in my home living room. We now have about 20 active members and growing. I'm aiming for 100 members between the ages of 12 and 27 by the end of the second year of this project."

What follows graduation for Priscilla? As she says best, "I hope to one day be one of the conductors for the L.A. Philharmonic. With great role models like, Alondra de la Parra, the first Hispanic female to conduct her own Philharmonic in New York, and Gustavo Dudamel, why not..."

Why not indeed?

Warm regards,

Tim

Tim White, Chancellor

Share your thoughts: http://fridayletters.ucr.edu/leavefeedback

Bikes, Real and Imagined
Artistic director Tyler Stallings has created a tribute to the impact bikes have on our society and our imagination at the Sweeney Art Gallery. It opens downtown on Thursday, Oct. 7 and coincides beautifully with Riverside's inaugural 2010 Riverside Citrus Classic Bike Run on October 17.
http://www.artsblock.ucr.edu/index.php?content=event-entry&event-ID=2.2010.0006.0001

Revealing the Genetic Code of Mosquitoes Will Save Lives
Peter Atkinson, Alex Raikhel, Peter Arensburger and their research teams from UCR have sequenced the genome of the mosquito that carries West Nile Virus. Published in today's Science this research breakthrough will lead to better ways to combat the disease in humans and animals.

http://newsroom.ucr.edu/news_item.html?action=page&id=2434

Find out what else is going on at UC Riverside: http://www.ucr.edu/happenings/