

## Dr. Francisco Rodriguez, Man of the Year



Dr. Francisco Rodriguez, president of Cosumnes River College.

*By Cameron Macdonald - Citizen Staff Writer*

Dr. Francisco Rodriguez wears many hats and has great responsibilities - he is president of Cosumnes River College, he chaired the Elk Grove Chamber of Commerce this year, and he recently taught an ethics class for graduate students at Sacramento State University.

However, he still goes out of his way to lend a hand to those in need.

Kay Albiani, a trustee on the Los Rios Community College District's board, recalled a time when he did just that.

She called him about a family friend who just graduated from Galt High School and his family of Mexican immigrants were concerned about him attending the University of California, Davis.

Rodriguez, himself a UC Davis graduate and son of Mexican immigrants, not only spoke to the student but he also traveled to his family's home in Herald to assure them that he would be fine in college.

"It was very much like when he was young," Albiani said.

She mentioned that Rodriguez went on to guide him through the college process.

"That shows the character of the guy - that is way above and beyond what I expected," Albiani said.

She later said, "It just makes me love him even more."

Rodriguez is the Citizen's Man of the Year for 2007. He demonstrated great leadership for a college that continues to grow and for an organization that created new development opportunities for Elk Grove businesses.

The Citizen interviewed him about his past work for the college and the chamber of commerce.

"I would say that the five years at CRC has been filled with excitement and enthusiasm, and quite a bit of change on campus," Rodriguez said about his college presidency.

As for the chamber, he listed their accomplishments within the past year such as creating a development group to help provide more economic opportunities for local business, and helping organize an economic development forum for Elk Grove.

The forum aims to "raise awareness and attention to the needs for a better rooftops-and-jobs mix" Rodriguez said.

The chamber currently has more than 750 members from local businesses, he said. There are also plans for the chamber to host another Elk Grove election forum for candidates next year.

Besides his work in the chamber, Rodriguez dedicated his life to higher education.

He has been involved in education for more than two decades, and he earned his Ph.D. at Oregon State University while he was working as president of Cosumnes River College.

In his essay, "Education is a Center of Hope," which was written for UC Davis's Fall Convocation last year, he noted the lessons learned from his working-class parents in San Francisco, and the opportunities that a college education can bring.

"I often looked over to my parents and saw the vestiges of hard work and a tireless work ethic exemplified..." he wrote.

Rodriguez continued to describe his father's thick hands that were shaped from the cannery and his mother's ankles that were swollen from her job at an industrial laundry.

He recalled the lessons he learned at the kitchen table where he heard about world events and the struggles that his family faced.

However, the table was also where he did his homework or “it is the place that I discovered my zeal for learning and my passion for public service.”

Rodriguez said that he grew interested in becoming an educator when he was a civil engineering major at UC Davis and worked in the school’s outreach program for first generation college students.

He soon began reading social science books.

“I’ve never put them down since,” he said.

Rodriguez went on to spend many years working in UC Davis’s student leadership and diversity education programs, and he later served as an associate dean at a Woodland community college.

He said that he was attracted to working at Cosumnes River College since it was in a rapidly growing and highly regarded community college district.

Rodriguez mentioned that his campus’s population has grown by more than 3,500 students since he became president and he added that the school is on its way to becoming 200,000-strong.

Rodriguez described the school as a “place that has not yet finished its growth potential.”

He was also attracted to the school’s high diversity, he said.

While he worked full-time as a college president, Rodriguez finished his Ph.D. in education where he spent a few years traveling to Oregon State for monthly meetings. He wrote his dissertation on community college presidents who were first-generation Americans and learned that many of them had a lot in common.

“I found that they had a tremendous ethic of public service and tremendous support from the family,” Rodriguez said.

He also mentioned that the presidents’ self-confidence helped them overcome many barriers in life.

As for how his doctorate affected his work, Rodriguez said, “It helped me become a better educator, a better thinker and a collaborator.”

On being an educator, he said: “The fact is that education is the key to a better life and I can be a part of opening doors of hope - that’s what I live for.”



Photos by Laura Bemis

Dr. Francisco Rodriguez taught an ethics class at Sacramento State University in addition to being Cosumnes River College president.