



VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

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VCCCD Names Mara Rodriguez 2022 Classified Employee of the Year

Moorpark College employee's impact extends beyond Zoo

Camarillo, Calif. (March 18, 2022)—In her nearly three decades with America's Teaching Zoo at Moorpark College, Mara Rodriguez has remained devoted to students, animals large and small and to the college itself. Her dedication to the college and the Ventura County Community College District (VCCCD) has garnered Rodriguez a special honor: 2022 VCCCD Classified Employee of the Year. The award recognizes classified professionals who demonstrate professional ethics and standards and serve the community with purpose and passion.

The District awards this distinction in accordance with the California Community Colleges (CCC) Board of Governors, who will consider Rodriguez for the CCC statewide award. Additional VCCCD Classified Employee of the Year nominees included Lt. Cesar Romero of the District Administrative Center, Amparo Medina of Oxnard College and Jessie Llamas of Ventura College.

“Over the years, I have worked with this year's honorees and have been impressed with their knowledge, expertise and passion for our campuses and the District,” said Board Chair Dianne McKay. “Their commitment serves as a shining example to students, faculty, classified staff and the greater community.”

“Mara, Cesar, Amparo and Jessie personify the best attributes of the District's classified employees,” said Chancellor Greg Gillespie. “In each of their unique roles, they continually strive to promote the District's mission of advancing student learning.”

Romero, a lieutenant with the VCCCD Police Department, has been with the District for 18 years. As the station supervisor at Oxnard College, he and his team are committed to keeping the campus safe for everyone. Romero is an active community volunteer, coaching youth sports, donating his time at Food Share Ventura County and participating in the county's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) COVID-19 screening sites. He is a faithful servant leader who encourages his team to try new things and flourish. His leadership also inspires students, faculty and other classified staff.

Rodriguez is beloved by all who interact with her, whether they be a person or animal. She has a deep commitment to high standards of professionalism. She believes so strongly in the mission of America's Teaching Zoo at Moorpark College that she left her longtime role as an instructional lab technician to be the zoo development coordinator. It is hard to imagine anyone being better-suited to represent the program and compel others to support it than Rodriguez. She is adept at building relationships and effecting change for the Exotic Animal Training and Management program, America's Teaching Zoo and campus at large.

Medina joined Oxnard College in 2015 and embodies the college's core values. As the student activities specialist, she teaches Associated Student Government leaders communication skills, leadership development and advocacy. She is also the classified senate president. Medina is a first-generation college graduate who knows firsthand the challenges students face and is a strong advocate for those who feel powerless. Equity-minded, student-centered and socially conscious, she was instrumental in bringing the Caring Campus initiative to the college and expanding peer mentoring opportunities.

Llamas has been the physical education/athletic equipment manager at Ventura College for the past 24 years. While most of the preparation for the college's 19 collegiate sports starts with her, she uses her insights, compassion and equity focus to help students who may be food insecure, or need personal items or transportation to a competition. As manager of the college's unhooded shower program, Llamas provides students towels, food, program assistance and, most importantly, dignity. Llamas's interactions with student-athletes leave a lasting impression for how she encourages them to believe in themselves and strive.

At the May 2022 Board of Governors meeting, up to six recipients will be honored as California Community Colleges Classified Employee of the Year. Winners will be presented with a \$750 cash award and a plaque.

Ventura County Community College District

The Ventura County Community College District is a member of the 116-campus California Community College system and serves approximately 31,000 students annually. The District's three colleges--Moorpark, Oxnard and Ventura--offer programs in general education for degrees and certificates, transfer to four-year colleges and universities, career technical education, and provide opportunities to engage in co-curricular campus activities. For more information, please visit vcccd.edu.

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