



VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

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Mara Rodriguez of Moorpark College Named California Community Colleges State Classified Employee of the Year

*Award honors professionals committed to ethics, standards
and mission of California community colleges*

Camarillo, Calif. (May 20, 2022) — California Community Colleges Board of Governors has selected Mara Rodriguez, zoo development coordinator at America’s Teaching Zoo at Moorpark College, as the 2022 State Classified Employee of the Year. This annual award recognizes the classified employees in the California community college system who demonstrate the highest level of commitment to student success and the mission of California Community Colleges.

“This recognition speaks to Mara’s relentless dedication to our students and the colleges they attend. She epitomizes service to others and the greater community, as she is always excited to speak on behalf of the Zoo and its mission,” said Chancellor Greg Gillespie.

“Every day, Mara brings her energy and expertise to campus to support our college, the Exotic Animal Training and Management Program and America’s Teaching Zoo,” added Moorpark College President Julius Sokenu. “We are immensely proud — yet not surprised — that she received this honor.”

In March, the Ventura County Community College District named Rodriguez its 2022 Classified Employee of the Year, citing her three decades of service to Moorpark College, its students, the animals housed at the Zoo and the community.

As zoo development coordinator, Rodriguez raises funds for the Zoo and its animals. Recent projects include Rajah’s Retreat, a \$3.5 million tiger habitat for Bengal tigers Neil and Karma that broke ground November 2021, and overseeing the completion of Ira’s Kingdom, an expanded enclosure named for the Zoo’s 8-year-old African lion.

“My work as an animal trainer fulfilled my own dreams and allowed me to help our students fulfill theirs,” Rodriguez said. “I have literally grown up here. I always laugh that I’ve grown old here with Clarence the Tortoise.”

The Board of Governors established the Classified Employee of the Year Awards by resolution in 2008 and has presented the award since May 2009. Recipients are nominated by peers within

their college and district and endorsed by the local board of trustees. Representatives from the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, Consultation Council and the Chancellor's Office select the California Community Colleges Classified Employee of the Year.

“Vance Manakas [retired Moorpark College employee] told me the honor was the highlight of his career,” added Rodriguez, who will attend the Board of Governors’ meeting in Sacramento on May 23 to receive a \$750 cash award and a commemorative plaque. “I am most looking forward to representing the college so soon after Vance did five years ago!”

Other state-level honorees include Mark Stramaglia, senior enterprise applications developer, MiraCosta College; Katie Cabral, research and planning analyst, Cuyamaca College; John Vandercook, district technical services supervisor, De Anza and Foothill colleges; Carolyn Y. Scott, executive assistant to the vice president of Academic Services, Las Positas College; and Armando Trujillo, educational advisor, Bakersfield College.

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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