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Local News

Family, determination key for new grads

5/21/05

By MORGAN GREEN
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Santa Barbara City College Graduation



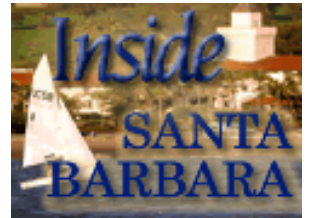
Twelve years ago, Eduardo Mosqueda was going nowhere fast. Then 15, the undocumented immigrant and unwed father was chiefly interested in cutting school with his buddies.

Soon he was out of school with no diploma, and his girlfriend had married and left the state with their child. After working minimum-wage jobs for six years, he

became a father once again. But this time, the desire to be a good dad inspired him not to end up like his parents, who worked as menial laborers in Santa Barbara just to keep a roof over the family.

"They were barely ever at home" and couldn't supervise or guide his childhood, he said.

"I just realized there was no future with the lifestyle that I was



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living. As an illegal immigrant, you can't do anything. You're paralyzed."

Seeing his daughter grow up motivated him to change his life. "It was one of the biggest factors in going back to school."

Mr. Mosqueda applied for permanent U.S. residency in 2002 and enrolled in remedial English and math classes at Santa Barbara City College, while working as a waiter and helping raise his daughter through a joint custody arrangement.

Now a legal resident at 27, he zoomed upward scholastically, earning a 4.0 grade-point average in academic courses required to transfer to a four-year university. His name appeared on the President's Honor Roll. This spring, he wrapped up his studies by juggling a whopping 23-credit academic load to graduate today with an Associate of Arts degree. He'll transfer this fall to San Diego State University to earn a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

Mr. Mosqueda is quick to give credit to City College's staff and programs that are geared to help full-time, low-income students, such as the state-funded Extended Opportunity Programs and Services.

"I simply wouldn't be here if not for that," he said. "They paid for my books, paid for my (class) units, they gave me all the tools I needed and support. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to afford school."

The once aimless youth who couldn't see beyond today now sees a lifetime profession within reach. "I want to be a probation officer and work with kids who have the same lifestyle I had, motivate them to do something better with their life. I think I can make a difference."

JON COURTNEY



After four years of focusing on computer science, 17-year-old Jon Courtney is graduating from Santa Barbara City College -- and ready to see what else is out there.

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He is so much further ahead in his education than most of his peers that he wants to take up to a year to sample other fields of study. "I find that at such a young age, I want to try out new things before I get stuck

to something for the rest of my life," he said.

Mr. Courtney got into computers at 9, took his first City College courses in the eighth grade and dived into SBCC's Middle College program of independent study instead of attending traditional high school.

He's not burned out on computer science, even though he's been working 30 hours a week in campus computer and media equipment repair, and has tutored for the past year.

"It's a blast holding huge amounts of things in your head," he said of computer engineering. "You have the overall picture, then you have to get really detailed in one area."

He compares the process to writing, "where you have to keep in mind the structure of your essay and how it flows together, but also the details, like what is a pronoun and how to take a sentence apart."

He was named the computer network engineering and electronics department's Student of the Year. Despite his young age, he was recently described by the department's chairman, Angel Cardenas, as "one of the best students in the program, ever."

Mr. Courtney has earned some time for some intellectual dabbling. Not only has he been an exceptional student, but he's progressed despite some hard knocks and tragedy in his personal life. Two summers ago, his older sister Christine became gravely ill. He spent weeks at her hospital bedside as she recovered. Then, early this week, his brother Robbie Courtney, 15, was struck down by a brain aneurism. Mr. Courtney again spent days at the hospital, by his dying brother's side, and finds some comfort in his brother's legacy. Because his organs were donated, said Mr. Courtney, Robbie saved the lives of five other people.

During both family medical crises, "every nurse told me to be a doctor," he said. So, looking forward, he is thinking of enrolling in a medical subject at City College in his coming months of "dabbling" before he decides on his life's course.

JASON SMITH



You could say that Jason Smith's wife Amy and 2-year-old daughter, Adrianna, graduated from Santa Barbara City College's marine technology program alongside him Friday, because they took a leap of faith together, abandoning their established life in North Platte, Neb., for a better future.

The Smiths' odyssey started with a gift of SCUBA diving lessons

Mr. Smith received 13 years ago. That's all it took for the former linen delivery truck driver to find his true calling. He became a volunteer for the local sheriff's department, performing rescue and recovery work underwater in local lakes and irrigation channels. But he dreamed of diving professionally, owning his own business.

So early last year, the Smiths packed up and headed to Santa Barbara so he could enroll in City College's widely recognized marine diving and technology program.

He picked his school carefully. "There's probably a hundred options," Mr. Smith said. "But we narrowed it down to 15 that were in the same league. Then I called around to (diving industry) contractors and asked them where their good students came from, and this was one of the schools."

It was difficult for the young family on a shoestring budget to give up a house and move to one of the most expensive spots in the nation. But they squeezed into a studio apartment. "It's

difficult to manage here, just the cost of living, and having such a small place. We don't have a garage or laundry facilities," he said.

Mr. Smith worked at two jobs while carrying a heavy class load of 20 credits. But the strain forced him to cut back to one job, as a tow truck driver. "I'm pretty tired, but it's one way I could make a living."

Some welcome help came in a \$500 scholarship, one of several awarded to City College students by the Montecito Rotary.

Mr. Smith's 14-month academic sprint paid off big. He has earned his Marine Diving Technology Certificate, Certificate of Completion in Commercial Diving, and certifications by the Association of Commercial Diving Educations/American National Standards Institute and the Association of Diving Contractors.

The family faces a rosy, and happily wet, future. They're moving to Northern California, where Mr. Smith will join Big Valley Divers for projects such as underwater dam inspections and salvage. "They said I'll be a diver, and a supervisor, and they'll work me into management."

JENNIFER JOHANN



It took Santa Barbara City College student Jennifer Johann decades to overcome a chaotic childhood, mental illness and drug addiction to "get my life together."

And to help celebrate, her far-flung and formerly estranged family is getting together too.

Ms. Johann, 35, on Friday received her Associate of Arts degree and certificate from the drafting/CAD department, specializing in landscape drafting. That event, she said, was made possible through her Christian faith, which she says changed her life. And, her achievement was just the happy landmark to trigger a family reunion.

"My mom just started it and everybody is coming. There's going to be a big wing ding," Ms. Johann said. "My brother and sister have never laid eyes on each other, and they'll see each other for the first time. My stepdad got a band together, and they even got a junior high teacher who used to be my legal guardian, she's coming."

Things weren't always so joyous for the Carpinteria resident. After a troubled childhood, during which she was sometimes self-destructive and even suicidal, she came to Santa Barbara for psychiatric treatment, and spent her first three years here as a client of the Devereux Foundation. "Devereux assisted me along the way. But then I found Jesus and it all got better," she said. "That's been the thing that's really worked to strengthen me."

She started at City College largely because it was so handy, hoping to build on some early child care courses she'd taken years before in Pasadena. Then Ms. Johann discovered drafting. "I loved it. It has turned into a great thing.

"Three years ago I found my father and sister. He's a former drafter and she's a landscape architect. The reasons I love drafting and gardening all made sense once I found them."

Ms. Johann excelled at her studies, becoming a tutor for four semesters in both computer-assisted and manual drafting. Recently, she won a \$500 scholarship from the Montecito Rotary.

Working as assistant director at the county's Architectural Archives, Ms. Johann has created a landscape garden in front of the drab building. She is quick to credit those who helped her reach her goals.

"City College is just awesome, the teachers' attitudes, their willingness to go beyond. When I first started school, I was still kind of getting my feet on the ground."

Laura Weldy, chair of the drafting program, "was one of my first teachers. She and other teachers here were always there to help me along. I wasn't sociable then, I didn't have social skills, but (Ms. Weldy) even helped show me the right way to dress for work," Ms. Johann said, adding brightly, "She's coming to the party too."

DUVAL BARBOSA GUIMARAES



Speaking only broken English, Duval Barbosa Guimaraes didn't intend to go to Santa Barbara City College after arriving here from Brazil, much less win a spot on the All-California Academic Second Team or earn four associates degrees and graduate with honors.

Mr. Guimaraes recalls that he simply wanted to improve his English.

Now a Phi Theta Kappa graduate, this 20-year-

old son of a farmer wasn't thinking about college in 2003. Nobody in his family had ever attended.

Rather, he left his girlfriend and their daughter in Brazil, believing that he'd learn enough English in one semester to teach it as a second language back home. He had discovered that studying here briefly in 2001 with a host family wasn't enough. "I could barely speak English."

But when he discovered a Brazilian could enroll and actually earn an academic degree, everything changed. "I was surprised."

Although he was homesick for his family, Mr. Guimaraes determined to stay.

Buckling down to work, he mastered English and earned a 3.9 grade-point average on the way to his Associate of Arts degrees in global studies, political science and liberal studies.

A new path for him opened recently with his acceptance to the honors program of the American University in Washington, D. C. The university also offered him a \$10,000 scholarship.

He aims to earn his degree at the university, then enter politics in Brazil, "either in a nonelected or elected position. I'm thinking about the diplomatic area."

To that end, Mr. Guimaraes has his eye on the university's international studies program, combined with communications, economics, legal institutions and government. Teaching English is something he would do "as a hobby."

He now faces a new challenge -- amassing enough money. The scholarship isn't enough. But, taking the attitude of "where there's a will there's a way," he is preparing to return home to go to work, save, and scour up more scholarships. He could lose the American University chance by the delay. But he shrugs that off.

"I'll apply to other schools as soon as I figure out how to pay for it."

For the present, with his City College degrees in hand and his confidence high, Mr. Guimaraes' thoughts are on those he left behind.

"My daughter is 3 on July 1. I have to be home."

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MIKE ELIASON / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Jennifer Johann.

Jason Smith, with wife Amy and daughter Adrianna.

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