



NEWS

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El Camino College Music Professor June Nelson Celebrates 50th Anniversary

El Camino College's Fine Arts Division will celebrate Music Professor June Nelson's 50th Anniversary of teaching at the college at 1 p.m. May 30 in the Marsee Auditorium.

What started as a temporary job at the Torrance-area campus has blossomed into five decades of teaching music to students from all over the South Bay. Nelson's Golden Anniversary at El Camino College marks the longest tenure served by any teacher at the college.

"I've always enjoyed working in the classroom, that is why I teach," she said. "The students have changed through the years, but they have always come to learn about music. And I've enjoyed teaching them. That has stayed the same."

Nelson first started at the college to fill in for the late Dr. Robert Haag, also a longtime El Camino College music teacher, who was in the service at the time. She figured the job would be temporary, as Dr. Haag would resume the position when he returned. But as it turned out, Nelson was needed as the college saw tremendous growth when servicemen returned and wanted to attend college under the G.I. Bill. She became a full-time El Camino College instructor in January 1956.

She was nervous on that first day of class – she tried to "dress up" to make herself appear older. At that time, students were mostly housewives who wanted to learn piano, or brush up on skills learned in childhood, Nelson said.

Through the past half century, Nelson taught a variety of courses from music appreciation to Applied Music, but she always stayed true to her passion – teaching piano. She actually started her career at age 11 – teaching piano to women who "discovered" her at church.

"I was performing at church on Sundays and soon several ladies from church recruited me to teach," Nelson said. "They were my first students!"

Music is so deeply ingrained her life, Nelson even married a music teacher. Working often with her husband and his students also added to her career experience and found its way into her lessons at El Camino College.

“June Nelson is a renowned and highly dedicated music professor whose love for music and performing shows in every note she teaches her students,” said El Camino College President Thomas M. Fallo. “She is an asset to our music department and we are grateful for her many years of service.”

Nelson grew up in the San Bernardino Valley and now lives in Orange County. She has a bachelor’s degree from USC, as well as a master’s degree in piano performance, also from USC. She also studied in Europe on a Fulbright Scholarship. When she returned from Europe, she was looking for a job and the post at El Camino College opened up.

“June Nelson’s contributions as a teacher, performer and innovator go beyond the norm and are simply too numerous to list,” said Leslie Back, acting dean of the Fine Arts Division. “One result of her efforts is El Camino College’s Applied Music program, a program that is still considered the model for other community colleges. June is a mentor and friend to colleagues, and she is consistently a role model for students.

“Her cheerful spirit and positive outlook are immediately apparent. June is a pleasure to know and to work with each day.”

Nelson has no plans for retirement. Yes, she does plan to leave the college eventually, but she will never leave her true calling – being a piano teacher.

“It is just such a part of my life, I can’t imagine leaving,” she said. “I know people in their 90s who still teach piano. I never will retire from that.”

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