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El Camino College Honors 10 “Women of Distinction”

Ten exceptional community leaders were recently honored at the 2011 El Camino College Women of Distinction Ceremony.

All 10 of these “Women of Distinction: were recognized for their dedicated service and contributions to the community: Portia Cohen, Lynn Fielding, Gloria Gray, Barbara Johnson, Teresa Matsuhima, Susan Prieto, Virginia Rapp, Sandra Suarez, Nina Velasquez, and Lynn Walker.

Nominated by friends, family, and colleagues, award winners were selected by the ECC Women’s History Month Committee, based on service in one or more of the following areas: professional accomplishments; leadership and/or mentorship; and social, educational, or health services. All honorees live or work within the El Camino Community College District.

The accomplishments of these award winners will be featured on the El Camino College Women’s Wall of Fame throughout the year and their names will be engraved on a plaque that is a permanent part of the display.

A full list of winners includes:

“Women of Distinction” 2011 Profiles

Portia Cohen is an attorney, former mayor of Manhattan Beach, and former Manhattan Beach council member. She was the official liaison to the city’s business, environmental and school communities, and serves as chair or member to 10 different state, regional, and local committees and organizations. Ms. Cohen has also served as a city planning commissioner, parks & recreation commissioner, and program director for Leadership Manhattan Beach. She worked for the Environment Now Foundation, where she led the Petroleum Litigation Project, a campaign focused on transitioning to clean, renewable energy sources. She is the recipient of the American Jurisprudence Award in Contracts.

Lynn Fielding has spent the past 18 years sharing her knowledge with students at ECC, covering two divisions and five subjects. In the Industry & Technology Division, she was the first female adjunct welding instructor, a position she took after earning her certificate of competence from ECC. In the Natural Sciences Division, she teaches oceanography, geology, physical geography, and world regional geography. She also helps with the Clay Club, repairing broken

metal stools in the studio and volunteering four hours per week to keep the ceramics studio open during non-class hours. Her dedication to students was recently recognized when she was honored with the first-ever ECC Academic Senate Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Award.

Gloria D. Gray, of Inglewood, is the current board president of the West Basin Municipal Water District. In 2006, she became the first African-American woman elected to the board in its 60-year history. Ms. Gray also serves as vice president of the Metropolitan Water District Board of Directors and in 2009 was appointed by L.A. County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas to serve on a water quality community task force. In April 2010, she was appointed to the Delta Stewardship Council by House Speaker-Emeritus Karen Bass. In addition to her active participation as a member on various community boards, and extensive list of recognitions and awards, Ms. Gray is the mother of two daughters and grandmother of five.

Barbara R. Johnson is a Los Angeles Superior Court judge who is also a dedicated community volunteer. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree at Yale University, she went on to earn a law degree at California Western School of Law in San Diego. After passing the California Bar exam, she opened a private practice in Inglewood, and later worked as an assistant city attorney for the City of Inglewood for eight years. She raised two college-graduate children, volunteered as a leader to the local Girl Scout troop and Sunday school, and has mentored countless African-American women of all ages. She is also an active member in the Black Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, where she served as president.

Teresa Takaki Matsushima has served many years at the El Camino College Student Health Center and as a school nurse in Lawndale. She has dedicated her life to improving the healthcare of the community by investing in free clinics and assisting with women and prenatal care. She also contributes to the medical mission field in Tijuana, Mexico, where she travels monthly to the Tijuana jail and local churches, bringing with her a slew of medical professionals and students to meet the medical needs of the area people. Even after a discouraging bout with cancer in 2008, Ms. Matsushima's energy, spirit, and passion are unrelenting. She continues to teach aspiring nurses the ropes, and lives every day with a genuine smile.

Susana Prieto has taught physics at El Camino College for the last 20 years. She is proactive in searching for new and engaging techniques to bring the subject matter to her students. Her sabbatical leave next year involves working with physics education specialists to learn new ways to bring the physical sciences to future teachers. Ms. Prieto organized the complete set of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for the Physics Department, and is the SLO representative for the Natural Sciences Division committee. A cancer survivor, she also finds time to participate in the breast cancer support group on campus. Her caring manner, compassionate ear and strong shoulder serve as a comfort and support to others in their time of need.

Virginia L. Rapp, dean of El Camino College's Business Division, is also an ECC alumna whose career experience includes teaching at various institutions and practicing as a legal attorney. Her extensive leadership on campus through the past decade has included serving as the vice president of academic affairs, representative on the college's Curriculum Committee, co-chairing the Academic Technology Committee, co-chairing the Associate Degree Task Force, chairing the Standard IV accreditation committee, and co-chairing the Women's History Month planning committee. She has recently assumed the position of administrator in charge of CETA, the Career and Technical Education Act, formerly known as VTEA.

Sandra Suarez, a 1975 graduate of El Camino College, is a dynamic force in her community. In 1996, she officially re-activated the Leuzinger High School PTA, which had been inactive since the 1950s. Seeking to improve classroom instruction, she also helped form Parents and Citizens for Quality Education in 2002. In addition, she was a founding board member of the Lawndale

Historical Society in 2005. She is currently the president of the Leuzinger High “Band Boosters,” and is active in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department Neighborhood Watch program. In 1998, she received the Media Arts Award from the Producers Guild; in 2006, she received the Honorary Service Award from the PTA.

Janina (Nina) Velasquez has served as the executive director of the El Camino College Federation of Teachers since 2000, and has been an active member since 1998. Nina serves as a mentor to all incoming officers to ensure a smooth transition for new leadership. Nina’s devotion to education can be seen in her outstanding service to El Camino College and to her community of Hawthorne. Nina was highly involved with the ECCFT in establishing a student scholarship through the ECC Foundation and in the past has given annual scholarships to local high school students. She is also a member of the Hawthorne Women’s Club and Rotary Club.

Lynn Walker has been a fifth-grade teacher at Carr Elementary School for the past 18 years and a part-time substitute teacher in the Torrance Unified School District for five years before that. She is active with the Carr Elementary School PTA, where she was awarded the 2011 Carr PTA Honorary Service Award. Lynn has also served the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Torrance for the past 35 years as a visiting teacher, Sunday school teacher, Primary President, Relief Society President, and twice as Young Women’s President, where she organizes and oversees the planning and organization of the annual Young Women’s Summer Camp. In 2010, Lynn received the Los Angeles Lakers Teacher of the Month award.

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