



NEWS

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El Camino College to Celebrate 2011 Distinguished Alumni Awards

After spending countless hours at El Camino College attending classes and participating in a variety of student activities, it was just 15 minutes at the Torrance-area campus that changed Cinna Toy-Wohlmuth's life forever.

At one point while in pursuit of her associate degree, she found herself not sure of her next step. Frustrated, she walked into the ECC counseling department and asked to speak to a counselor – any counselor. Dr. Olive Hall was available and invited Toy-Wohlmuth to sit down.

"I knew I was interested in science and had a general idea of what I wanted to do, but didn't know how to get there," Toy-Wohlmuth said. "Well, Dr. Hall knew exactly what I needed to do and put me on the right road. I had never met her before, yet it is amazing how someone could touch my life so deeply in only 15 minutes. I really don't think I would be doing what I am doing today if it wasn't for her."

Through Dr. Hall's suggestion, Toy-Wohlmuth transferred to Loma Linda University where she earned a bachelor's degree and a medical degree. She is now Assistant Clinical Professor in Obstetrics and Gynecology at Loma Linda University and the Obstetrics and Gynecology Program Director at White Memorial Medical Center.

Toy-Wohlmuth is one of five El Camino College alumni to be honored at the 2011 Distinguished Alumni Awards, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. October 1 in the college's East Dining Room. In addition to Toy-Wohlmuth, recipients also include: David Benoit, musician/composer; Donald Brann, El Segundo councilman and vice president of the Da Vinci Schools' Board of Trustees; Pat Furey, Torrance councilman and Los Angeles County principal deputy county counsel; and Michael Montoya, director, Southern California Edison.

ECC Distinguished Alumni have shown outstanding achievement in their chosen career, service to the community or area of endeavor, and have gained local, state, or national recognition for their involvement. Honorees were selected by a committee and represent the fields of art, medicine, politics, business, and education.

Toy-Wohlmuth is the second alumni in her family to be honored for this award, and was nominated by her older sister Donna Toy-Chen, who was a Distinguished Alumni at El Camino College's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 1997. Toy-Wohlmuth said her time at ECC was

definitely a family affair – of the eight Toy children, six attended ECC, and her parents were tireless volunteers.

“I started at El Camino College as a junior in high school in 1975 to take advanced placement classes; when I graduated high school, I was so comfortable at the college – I just thought it would be a great place to continue my education.” said Toy-Wohlmuth, whose first interaction at ECC was swimming lessons as a child.

“Did I have a fantastic time? It was great! The activities and clubs were so fun. I grew so much as a person; this is that important transition time between high school and college and El Camino College was the perfect environment for that. It was phenomenal how I grew as an individual and with group leadership. I was born and raised in Gardena, but I grew up at El Camino College.”

El Camino College 2011 Distinguished Alumni Honorees also include:

David Benoit is a Grammy nominated jazz pianist, composer and producer who studied music at ECC. In addition to his jazz career which has included more than 25 solo recordings, Benoit is also music director for the Asia America Symphony and Asia America Youth Orchestra, an on-air personality for KJAZZ radio, and is the artistic director for the Korean Youth Symphony.

Donald Brann is the former superintendent of the Wiseburn School District in Hawthorne, and attended the district’s schools as a youth. In his 40 years as an educator, he held teaching and administrative positions, in addition to other superintendent assignments. Brann founded the Da Vinci Charter Schools in 2008, the same year he was elected to the El Segundo City Council.

Pat Furey is employed as Los Angeles County Principal Deputy County Counsel assigned to the Children's Services Division. He is also a Torrance city councilman and has served on various civic committees for many years. He is also active with Torrance Unified School District committees, and served as the president of the Torrance Education Foundation for four terms.

Michael Montoya is the director of grid advancement for Southern California Edison’s Transmission & Distribution Business Unit. He has 36 years of utility industry experience, including 30 years of evaluating and implementing smart grid technologies. He is a member of several advisory boards, including California State University campuses in Long Beach and LA.

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