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El Camino College Cherry Blossom Festival Honors Scholarship Winners, Celebrates the Start of Spring

El Camino College's 15th Annual Dr. Nadine Ishitani Hata Memorial Cherry Blossom Festival recently brought the campus community together for a celebration of spring featuring music, dancing, and poetry.

The 2015 Dr. Nadine Ishitani Hata Scholarship was also awarded at the event, recognizing the achievements of student nurse Emma Nazario and radiologic technology student Rafael Torres.

When Rafael was a student at Hawthorne High School, he readily admits that he wasn't a serious student. In fact, he "barely made it" to graduation. He enrolled in El Camino College's radiological technology program and turned his academic career around.

"I quickly figured out what I needed to do to be successful, and I knew that going to school was the way to a secure future," said Rafael, also who worked 30 to 40 hours per week to help his mother and younger siblings and worked as a lab aide at ECC. "It is an excellent program – it involved many long days, but I enjoyed them."

Rafael will transfer in the fall to California State University, Dominguez Hills and plans to earn bachelor's and master's degrees.

Emma is finishing the second year of the ECC nursing program and intends to transfer to CSUDH this fall to earn bachelor's and master's degrees, with the ultimate goal of becoming a nursing instructor.

The annual "Dr. Nadine Ishitani Hata Memorial Cherry Blossom Festival" is named after the college's former Vice President of Academic Affairs, who passed away in 2005 after a 34-year career at El Camino College.

When Dr. Hata was undergoing cancer treatment, she was so impressed with the El Camino College graduates she encountered in the fields of nursing, respiratory care and radiologic technology that she decided to support future students' academic endeavors. This \$1,000 scholarship is now awarded to up to two deserving students each year.

Hata was instrumental in working with American Honda Motor Corporation to bring several dozen Japanese cherry trees to El Camino College 15 years ago. The trees were donated to El Camino College by American Honda as a traditional gesture of friendship, similar to the gift given to America by Japan in 1912. Those cherry trees still bloom in Washington, D.C. Under Hata's leadership, the cherry blossom festival has become a college tradition celebrating friendship and the beginning of spring. Karin Baker, from American Honda's corporate community relations, also attended the event.

This year's cherry blossom festival also featured original haiku from students in English instructor Clint Margrave's poetry class, as well as taiko drummers and a lion dance performance from the Taiko Center of Los Angeles.

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