

Staff News for Santa Rosa Junior College, September 28, 2004

A TRIBUTE TO DUANE E. BLACKWILL

This special edition of the Insider stems from the passing of Duane Blackwill on September 9, 2004, a longtime Santa Rosa Junior College administrator, counselor, and faculty member who contributed significantly to the growth of the District in Petaluma.

Clearly, from the comments of many SRJC faculty, staff and Board members who worked with Duane during his 1967-1992 tenure at SRJC, Duane's dedication and vision impacted SRJC employees and students in profound ways.

The college community honors Duane for the excellent man and administrator he was. He will be greatly missed. Duane Blackwill left a substantial legacy, having served for 50 years in education. Duane was hired at Santa Rosa Junior College in August 1967 as a faculty member in the Counseling Department on the Santa Rosa Campus. When he was asked to go to Petaluma to initiated classes there, Duane was eager to establish a successful program. In 1974 he became SRJC's first administrator of the Petaluma Center when he was appointed Associate Dean, a position he held until he retired in December 1992. His primary aim in Petaluma was to develop a quality educational program where students could finish their requirements for an A.A. degree or pursue vocational training.

Many of Duane's colleagues identify his engaging personality as the key quality that led to his appointment as the center's director. In a word, Duane was selfless without equivocation, which manifested itself in his dedicated leadership of the Petaluma project. He was highly adept at converting his ideas to substance, which provided the impetus for growth by correctly identifying the community's needs and translating them to relevant course offerings.

Offering a bulwark of support for a Petaluma Center, Duane and other prominent SRJC advocates envisioned a site long before it was established in 1974. He worked with Curt Groninga, Vice President of Administrative Services, and Herold Mahoney, former SRJC Board member, to find properties for a Petaluma Center. Eventually they convinced the Board of Trustees to buy land for a

permanent campus. Duane developed the educational program for Petaluma in conjunction with Brooke Tauzer, SRJC's first Vice President of Academic Affairs. Duane's dedication, vision, patience, and good sense contributed immeasurably to the stability and forecast for the eventual Petaluma Campus.

SRJC's first Petaluma Center was the Butcher's Union Building with 230 students enrolled when the semester opened. The center moved to the Presbyterian Church and to Petaluma Fairgrounds. Classes were held day and evening in the Fairground buildings and expanded to other community sites, including the Petaluma High School, Petaluma Swim Center, Hermann Sons Hall, and the Petaluma Airport. The Petaluma Center moved to its current site on Sonoma Mountain Parkway in January 1995, and in spring 1999 the 'Center' became an official 'Campus.'

Duane understood that there could be no permanent SRJC center in Petaluma unless the community embraced the value of SRJC's educational programs in southern Sonoma County. He set out to present the benefits of SRJC offerings and the





"His proactive and inclusive leadership and personality created a family atmosphere where all were welcome..."

importance of a permanent Petaluma Center to the community by essentially 'adopting Petaluma' through his broad involvement in community affairs. Duane sat in front of grocery stores, talked to people in malls, and appeared at events to encourage Petaluma citizens to enroll at SRJC. Eventually he was elected president of the Petaluma Rotary Club and actively served on the Petaluma Chamber of Commerce. He rode in the Butter and Eggs Day Parade and was pleased to be located behind the "big chicken" at the Fairground site. He attended endless high school activities, fund-raising events, fairs, and youth activities, and also invited the Petaluma citizens and businesses

to tour SRJC's Petaluma Center. It is Duane's extensive outreach that gradually created goodwill toward SRJC in Petaluma.

Duane was dedicated to the success of SRJC students. He made it a point to know the students by name, and frequently visited classrooms and labs. He was very supportive of women reentry students, who he personally recruited to expand their skills in educational

programs. As a former counselor he knew all the requirements for certificates, prerequisites for classes, and the names of staff members who could assist students.

Duane's accomplishments were extensive and included restructuring the Business Office Technology and Computer and Information Sciences programs, developing liberal arts offerings, creating a Macintosh lab, publishing articles in professional journals on physical education, social science teaching, and psychology, and bringing the semester length fire technology courses to Petaluma at the portable classrooms at the Fairgrounds, creating more access to Marin County and Sonoma County fire students.

When SRJC staff and faculty comment about Duane, they often say that there was nothing that Duane wouldn't do for the success of the Petaluma Center, and that it was his proactive and inclusive leadership and personality that created a family atmosphere where all were welcome. Despite the faculty teaching at sites throughout Petaluma, Duane knew each instructor and encouraged everyone to get to know one another.

A TRIBUTE TO DUANE E. BLACKWILL

The list of activities Duane achieved to make the Petaluma Center a success is endless. He worked hard to bring full- and part-time instructors to the Petaluma Center, where everyone helped with every aspect of the operation, from testing and counseling to budgeting and registration. When new computers became available for the BOT/CIS labs and there were no funds for tables. Duane raided the warehouse in Santa Rosa and brought back science tables and simply cut their legs to the proper height for computers. Duane worked as counselor, administrator, custodian, and cheerleader. He delivered mail, provided security, acted as a gardener, painter, facilities coordinator, and scheduler. He secured a refrigerator, microwave, and couch for the staff, and regularly checked in with faculty and staff to see what was needed. When the bathroom pipes busted, he mopped up. He brought donuts for students and staff before they went to class, and held barbecues for Petaluma faculty, staff, and their families. He was faculty advisor to many clubs, including the Men's Luncheon Club and the Black Student Union, and participated in homecoming activities, chaperoned dances, and attended athletic games, and worked for the academic eligibility of SRJC athletes.

As a youth in Visalia, California, Duane was determined not to become a cotton picker or bread truck driver, and instead pursued higher education by attending the University of the Pacific. When he married Ctesylla and had a family, they became parents dedicated to seeing that each of their children received a solid

education. Duane's devotion to family and to high quality education manifested in his directorship of SRJC's Petaluma Center. In 1984 when members of the Petaluma Center celebrated its tenth anniversary at the Green Mill Inn, everyone joined together to honor Duane with a standing ovation for his remarkable leadership.

Duane Blackwill represents the heart and soul of the Santa Rosa

Junior College. He loved working with students and always gave them direct information and guidance. Even after he retired in 1992, Duane continued counseling as an adjunct faculty in 1993, and proudly watched the Petaluma Campus be built in 1995 and thrive. For Duane, his dream did come true.

As a larger-than-life person who dedicated his life to SRJC, the College owes a huge debt of gratitude to Duane for his steadfast belief that Petaluma could be a focal point for education in

southern Sonoma County. Without Duane there would be no Petaluma Campus today. We honor Duane for his unique driving force and depth of commitment that has made and continues to make such a difference in the lives of everyone at Santa Rosa Junior College, past, present and future.

Petaluma Fairgrounds



www.santarosa.edu/insider/

Published by the SRJC Public Relations Office (707) 527-4266

Board of Trustees: Frank S. Briceno, B. Robert Burdo, Richard W. Call, Kathleen Doyle, W. Terry Lindley, Mike Smith RN, Don Zumwalt, Nick Caston, Student Dr. Robert F. Agrella, SRJC President and District Superintendent

SRIC President and District Superintendent
Susan Bagby Matthews, Public Relations Manager/Editor
Mike Garcia, Graphic Designer
SRIC Graphic Services, Printer