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## Letter - San Joaquin County 14th Annual Diversity Luncheon

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## San Joaquin County 14th Annual Diversity Luncheon

October 12, 2011

### ***Our Common Goal***

It is a privilege to be here at San Joaquin County's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Diversity Luncheon. I want to thank Administrator Manuel Lopez, the County Board of Supervisors, the Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee, and the County Department Heads - first of all for throwing this important event every year, and second for inviting me to speak with you.

I am happy to get to thank everyone who serves our fine county: from elected officials, to the employees who work hard everyday for San Joaquin's 685,000 residents, to the labor organizations who support them. My husband, Bill, and I have lived in San Joaquin County since 2009, when I became President of University of the Pacific. We are proud to call this place home. From the incredible weather and outdoors activities, to the wide array of business and services, to the amazing people: we have never been happier. This is a wonderful place. Thank you for all that you do to make the residents of San Joaquin County comfortable, safe and happy.

Ask a roomful of people from San Joaquin County what makes us special, and one answer you're sure to hear is our rich diversity. For more than 150 years, we have welcomed newcomers from every nationality and ethnicity. Today our community is a crossroads of the world: its population a vibrant blend of heritages and traditions.

It's absolutely true that there is no "one size fits all" in San Joaquin. But we certainly have common goals. In fact, that is the title of my talk today: Our Common Goal. I cannot think of any more important or more unifying objective than a bright future for our youth (which, of course, will mean a bright future for our region). A diverse educated workforce and diverse leadership are essential for our county's future, and California's future. It's up to us as parents, neighbors, educators and community members to work together to ensure that young people from every background are ready to join that workforce, and be those leaders. We must prepare our children for tomorrow.

Allow me to start with a story. It may sound familiar to some of you.

Not so long ago, a poor Mexican-American teenager toiled in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley. As a boy, he had dreamed of becoming an astronaut. Instead, he picked tomatoes from dawn to dusk, every single day. His hands were perpetually ripped and bloody from pulling weeds, and his nights were spent sleeping fitfully underneath a leaky camper.

This young man's story doesn't end the way you might expect. It is a testament to his own remarkable grit...and to the transformative power of education. Our protagonist defied the odds, completed his high school degree and enrolled in college in Stockton. He went on to build a first-rate career in science, where he made amazing findings and charted new territory. Today he is a role model and a hero in our community.

Some of you listening to my story may have assumed I've been talking about University of the Pacific's own Jose Hernandez, Class of 1985. Indeed, Jose worked in the Central Valley's fields as a young man, hoeing beets under the hot California sun. He too dreamed of reaching the stars as an astronaut. His parents made the brave decision to give up their way of life as migrant farm workers to stay in Stockton so their children could complete their educations. Jose excelled. Eventually he enrolled in University of the Pacific through CIP, our Community Involvement Program for local youth. His Pacific education put him on a path that led, in August 2009, to the launch pad of the Space Shuttle Discovery. On that balmy August night, the Stockton and University communities came together to watch one of our own make history.

My story could have been about Jose, but it wasn't. You see, Jose is not the only young man from this region to move from migrant farm work to an internationally-renowned science career. Alfredo Quinones-Hinojosa was once a migrant farm worker called "Freddy." Today he is "Dr. Q": a neuroscientist at Johns Hopkins University who performs 250 brain surgeries a year. He is known throughout the world for his revolutionary work on brain cancer. Dr. Q made a new life for himself by taking advantage of higher education in this community - our community. He attended San Joaquin Delta College. From Delta he went on to complete his BS at Cal and his MD at Harvard Medical School. (Incidentally, when a New York Times reporter asked Dr. Q if Harvard was tough, he replied, "not compared to working in the fields!")

The stories of Alfredo Quinones-Hinojosa and Jose Hernandez illustrate a powerful point: we have tremendous talent here in San Joaquin County. And we have quality colleges and universities that can help our young people succeed. But these stories also highlight the powerful odds some of our children are battling. For every success story, how many others never made it? How many potential astronauts and brain surgeons fell behind in elementary school and never caught up? How many would-be teachers and dentists dropped out of high school to help earn money for their families? How many potential leaders never even considered college in the first place?

We are all aware that San Joaquin County is facing serious educational challenges. According to the California Department of Education, nearly 25% of our high school students drop out. Of those who do graduate, only about 27% have taken and passed the courses they need to be UC or CSU

eligible. In my home city of Stockton, only 11% -13% of Stockton Unified graduates are UC/CSU eligible. And African American and Latino students are less likely to be eligible than Asian or white students. Put another way: in fall 2010, only 201 of the 1547 Stockton Unified graduates were ready for college. But even fewer than that took the SAT or ACT.

I am proud to say that the school districts in our region are all determined to change these statistics. They are working to reverse the dropout crisis and get graduates to college. But they need our help. How can we work together to help our teachers, administrators and students meet this crucial goal?

I pledge to you that University of the Pacific is committed to helping increase college readiness in our region. I know you're all familiar with the stereotype of a university as an ivory tower isolated from real life. (When it comes to setting that stereotype straight, I know it doesn't help that we actually have a big ivory tower smack in front of our campus!) When we hear "ivory tower," we think about how cut off a community can feel from the college or university in their town. But University of the Pacific's people do not want to be isolated from our community. Pacific's people are also San Joaquin's people. And we are deeply committed to serving this region.

Two years ago, I launched the "Beyond Our Gates...Into the Community" initiative to enhance and synergize Pacific's community outreach. An important part of Beyond Our Gates is a commitment to community dialog: we conducted six community forums in spring 2010, and are continuing to hold them now. Our latest forum took place this very morning. It was devoted to K-12 education. We invited teachers, administrators and other education leaders to talk about what steps are needed to increase college readiness. We also asked Dr. Elizabeth Molina Morgan, a leading national education reformer, to attend and give us her thoughts. Dr. Morgan heads up Grad Nation, a campaign within Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance. Grad Nation has an audacious goal, which they share with President Barack Obama: a nationwide 90% high school graduation rate by 2020. Can you imagine how it would impact San Joaquin County, if we could achieve that here? Can you imagine how many Jose Hernándezes and Dr. Q's this community could keep from slipping through the cracks?

### **The Tomorrow Project**

One key way that Pacific plans to increase San Joaquin County's high school graduation rates and college readiness is our new K-12 initiative: the Tomorrow Project. The Tomorrow Project, which came out of Beyond Our Gates, is an intensive, multi-year, sustained engagement with our region's youth. The central component of the Tomorrow Project is summer, weekend, and after-school "academies" aimed primarily at students in grades 6-12. These programs, offered in a variety of subjects, act to inspire our youth and support and reinforce their public school education.

### **Reach for the Stars Academy**

This summer, working closely with wonderful community partners, we rolled out a series of Tomorrow Project academies. One was the Reach for the Stars academy. This is a STEM-field

academy (STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics) that ran in June and July. We put it on in partnership with José Hernandez's Reaching for the Stars Program, the MESA program, and our Schools of Engineering and Computer Science and Benerd School of Education. It's supported in part by gifts to the Reaching for the Stars Foundation from two Pacific Regents. Thirty-six students participated in our first Reach for the Stars academy this summer.

Reach for the Stars academy is modeled on the successful "TexPrep" program that has reached over 28,000 students in 17 Texas cities. Of the students who participated in Tex Prep, 75% are minorities, 99.9% graduated from high school, 99% attended college, and 85% obtained a college degree, half of them with degrees in the STEM fields that are critically important for this country's future. This is truly a program that works!

### **Harmony Stockton**

Our other new academy is Harmony Stockton, a music academy that runs for the whole school year. Harmony Stockton is put on in partnership with the Stockton Symphony, Stockton Unified and Pacific's Conservatory of Music. It has received generous funding from the United Way, with matching gifts from the Community Foundation of San Joaquin. (We really could not make the Tomorrow Project work without our excellent community partners and generous donors.)

People are very excited about this academy! Harmony Stockton is based on "El Sistema" - have any of you heard of El Sistema? It's a revolutionary music program for young people that got started in Venezuela back in 1975. El Sistema now reaches hundreds of thousands of children across Venezuela, 90% of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. It introduces kids as young as 2 or 3 to classical music, eventually teaching them an instrument and bringing them into a youth orchestra. El Sistema helps kids develop a positive self-image. They learn that they are competent, resilient and creative. Students also develop important life skills like a healthy work ethic, and they gain a sense of history and culture.

El Sistema has been credited with transforming an entire generation in Venezuela. It can do the same right here in our community. Today we have 35 students from Stockton's Marshall Elementary enrolled in the academy. But, since we have another 20 kids on the waiting list, we are going to start a second class in January!

I recently heard the most poignant story about Harmony Stockton that I just have to share with you. The kids in Harmony Stockton are younger: third through fifth grade. In the first few weeks of the academy, the students learn about music, but they don't actually touch an instrument. A couple weeks ago, the teachers finally passed out the instruments amid great fanfare.

When one little third grader got her violin, she was so happy that she leaned over and kissed it. For me, that right there sums up what kind of a difference we can make.

Pacific and our many partners are working like crazy to make the Tomorrow Project successful, so

that students like those at Marshall Elementary, where 80% receive free or reduced-price lunch, can have a brighter future. For our community's future hinges on improving the educational achievement of our youth - from the children of migrant farm workers to the children of our wealthiest citizens. It demands a well-educated and diverse workforce of college graduates, whether from Delta Community College, CSU Stanislaus, UC Davis, or University of the Pacific.

At Pacific, we are committed to improving college readiness in this region - and we are also committed to attracting the best and brightest students to stay right here in San Joaquin County. Every year the Record sponsors the inspirational Pinnacle Awards, which celebrate the top 1% of high school seniors in San Joaquin and Calaveras Counties. It's a terrific and wonderfully diverse group of bright, hardworking students. The Pinnacle awards are held at Pacific. Every year I read the list of where the winners are heading for college, and I get dismayed. We lose so many of our best local students, especially our best local students of color, to USC, Stanford and Harvard. To schools that can afford to give them the full scholarships they deserve. And when our students leave for college, too often they never come back, and we lose out on having these remarkable leaders in our community.

So let's work together to encourage our young people to stay in school. To support our K-12 teachers and administrators. To push our youth to graduate ready to attend college. Let's make sure our schools - from elementary schools all the way up to higher education institutions - are up to the task of educating our best and brightest. Let's figure out a way to keep our most promising young people right here, and not lose the leaders of tomorrow because of a lack of scholarship dollars. I can assure you that this is a top priority at University of the Pacific. Together, let's all of us invest in the future of San Joaquin County. We have so much to celebrate in our magnificent diversity, and so much to cherish in the love for this region that brings us together.