

Alumna investigative journalist to be honored at Founders Day dinner



ERICA E. LUSK/TWP

Washington Post reporter Dana Priest (Merrill '81) this year earned her second Pulitzer Prize, making her the first UCSC graduate to have twice been accorded journalism's highest honor. Priest's 2007 exposé of the mistreatment of wounded veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center documented unsanitary conditions, an unresponsive bureaucracy,

inadequate treatment for patients, and numerous other problems. The revelations prompted a national outcry, government-initiated reforms at the hospital, and the resignation of Secretary of the Army Francis Harvey. For breaking and telling the story, Priest shared the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for public service with colleague Anne Hull and photographer Michel du Cille.

Priest's first Pulitzer came in 2006 for exposing secret U.S. government "black site" prisons and other unknown aspects of the government's counterterrorism campaign. Her articles disclosed the secret international transport of "terror" suspects and the now-famous "torture memo" that authorized "enhanced interrogation" techniques to extract intelligence information from suspects.

Priest "embodies the ways in which an education at UC Santa Cruz carries people into the future, enabling them to make an impact in very broad ways," said former College Eight Provost Roz Spafford. Priest has visited UCSC several times in recent years, where she's a willing and inspiring mentor to student reporters.

In honor of these and other accomplishments, Priest will receive the 2008–09 UCSC Alumni Association Alumni Achievement Award, which will be presented October 24 at the Coconut Grove in Santa Cruz during the campus's annual Founders Day celebration.

For ticket information, contact the UCSC Special Events Office at (831) 459-5003 or specialevents@ucsc.edu.

Alumnus looks to expand support for innovative program dedicated to helping students who are foster youth



Victoria Wilder Eisenberg (left, with her children) lived in more than 20 foster homes while she was growing up. Despite that formidable obstacle, last year Eisenberg reached a goal that only about 28 percent of Americans have attained: getting a bachelor's degree.

Eisenberg got help in achieving that milestone from the Smith Renaissance Society, a grassroots, alumni-initiated effort that provides financial, academic, and emotional support to UCSC students who are orphans, veterans of the foster-care or juvenile-justice systems, or others who have been forced to experience life on their own.

"As you can imagine, trying to fit into the college experience was hard," says Eisenberg, "because I knew I wasn't like everyone else, especially those who had families."

The Smith Society was founded in 1999 by Bill Dickinson (Cowell '68, pictured below), who, like Eisenberg, had been on his own when he arrived on the newly opened UCSC campus in 1965.

Since graduating, Dickinson has had several successful careers as an educator, speechwriter, business journalist, and entrepreneur. But he says the accomplishment that makes him most proud is his enduring legacy of helping students in need.

When Eisenberg arrived at UCSC, she had been homeless for months, having been "emancipated" from the foster care system.

Getting support from the Smith Society was transformative.

"I became a part of the Smith Society, and my [life] changed dramatically," Eisenberg says. "I have been cared for, nurtured, and, like a little seed, have grown into a beautiful spring blossom."

While completing a double major in community studies and theater arts, she served as a Smith Society student leader, was involved in student drama productions, got married, and had two children.

Since its inception, nearly 150 students like Eisenberg have been served by the Smith Society program. All but a handful have graduated or are on track to graduate—a remarkable record.

Dickinson credits his years at UCSC—the creative, interesting education and supportive community presided over by Cowell College founding provost Page Smith and his wife, Eloise—with his success. The Smith Renaissance Society was named in their honor.

"Page and Eloise treated me with real respect, an uplifting first for me," Dickinson says. "We aim to provide that sort of lift for our students, which helps account for our awesome retention and graduation rates. The Smith Society needs more funding. Two hundred new donors giving at least \$100 a year would keep our noble little boat afloat," says Dickinson.

As the society moves toward its 10th year of operation, increased financial support will provide scholarships for students; ultimately, supporters aim to establish an endowment to ensure the program's smooth operation into the future.

Donations can be made at giving.ucsc.edu; for more information, contact Development Director Kathleen Rose Hughes at (831) 459-4552 or khughes@ucsc.edu.



Student, mother, dreamer: Scholarship opens doors for Rachel Cordero



JIM MACKENZIE

Not long ago, Rachel Cordero was a divorced mother of two young children facing the aftermath of a difficult marriage, devastating economic dislocation, and an unknown future.

Her sons struggled to adjust to their parents' breakup. The shattered family moved into Cordero's mother's home to plan their next move.

"I figured I could either go straight to work and barely pay the rent," she remembers, "or look for a way to make a better life for myself and my family. I decided to go back to school and realize my dreams."

Returning to community college years after she had

first started, she received an A.A. degree and transferred to UCSC. Today, she is on track to graduate with a B.A. in psychology and plans to pursue a graduate degree and a career in organizational or clinical work. The future looks bright.

Success did not come easy, though.

"I'm not a 'normal' student," Cordero says. "As a parent, I'm rushing from campus to pick up my kids from school, start dinner, and get them going on their homework. . . . Sometimes it gets lonely being the only parent in a classroom of younger students."

But with help from campus advisers and motivation from inspiring professors, "I'm making it work," she says, enthusiastically.

Cordero got a major boost last year when she was one of 34 undergraduates selected for a \$3,000 Alumni Association Scholarship Fund award. The coveted scholarships are given to students with demonstrated financial need and the ability to overcome obstacles to higher education. Getting the renewable award was "validation that I'm worth it," says Cordero, and allows her to mesh family obligations with the demands of her senior year: an internship, graduate school applications, a full course load, and "continuing to be a 100 percent focused mom."

Donations to the UCSC Alumni Association Scholarship Fund provide support for motivated students such as Cordero, and may be made at giving.ucsc.edu.