

Nurturing Change

Growing up near San Diego, less than 50 miles from the Mexican border, Nidya Ramirez was a firsthand witness to the immense hardships, alienation, and hostility experienced by recent immigrants.

Now Ramirez, who graduated from UC Santa Cruz in June with a degree in feminist studies, feels a responsibility to help people in difficult circumstances—including immigrants, the poor and working class, refugees, children, and abused women.

"I have a very personal connection to it because, among my family members and the community I live in, the majority of people are immigrants," said Ramirez, 22, who moved back to her hometown of Escondido after graduating. "So the struggles they go through, I've seen and felt."

Ramirez was one of two recipients of this year's UCSC Community Service Award. The \$500 awards, presented annually to one or more graduating feminist studies seniors, were initiated in 2001 by local patrons Peggy Downes Baskin and Mary Solari.

Ramirez, a first-generation college student, interned at California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) in Santa Cruz in 2007 and now plans to attend law school.



"One of the nicest things you can do for an individual is help with their education," says Mary Solari (above), who established the Community Service Award with Peggy Downes Baskin.

She provided translation services at CRLA, helped clients fill out paperwork, and called attorneys and social workers about clients' cases.

"It was good experience because it was a small place that needed a lot of help," Ramirez said.

Receiving the award "made me feel a sense of recognition," she said.

Her experience at CRLA taught her that "there's so much work to do for people who are low income, who don't get the same attention as others," Ramirez said. "There's so much work, but it's not paid as much as other jobs, and not a lot of people are willing to do it."

She hopes education inspires others to build awareness about issues and transcend their perceived limits.

"Before going to UCSC, I didn't know a lot," Ramirez said. "I learned so much there about being critical about my surroundings

and how to put my passion for change into action."

Being away at college in Santa Cruz made her realize how much there was to do at home in Escondido.

"I'm from this community," she said. "I feel like I have a certain responsibility to it. I want to be here for a lot of the change that I would like to create."

—GWEN MICKELSON



Nidya Ramirez

Recognizing community service

To **Mary Solari**, it's important to help students who really need it and can advance in their careers "with a little bit of help."

"It's very gratifying," said Solari, whose late husband, Richard Solari, was president, CEO, and chairman of Granite Construction Co. of Watsonville. "One of the nicest things you can do for an individual is help with their education."

Solari and fellow UCSC patron **Peggy Downes Baskin**, a former professor of politics at Santa Clara University and a lecturer and research associate in feminist studies at UCSC, established the award in 2001 with a \$10,000 pledge.

The awards are presented each year to graduating feminist studies seniors to recognize outstanding community service.

For information about the Community Service Award, or to contribute to the Humanities Division, contact Liz Sandoval at (831) 459-4713 or lsand@ucsc.edu.