

Profile

Maria Heredia Finds Reward in Counseling

By Michael Kushner

Special to the Guardsman

Tucked quietly away in an 8-foot by 12-foot office on the second floor in the rear of Conlan Hall, a 13-year veteran of City College can be found bright and early reading herself for her busy daily routine — helping students prepare for the future.

With little fanfare for her tireless work, General Counselor/African-American Achievement Program Counselor Maria Heredia is still content on helping students fulfill their dreams.

Her desk and shelves are piled with files and forms, career guidance books that are filled with helpful information, printed pamphlets with specialized instructions for students and counselors, and mounds of paper notes and minutes from all the committees and shared governance meetings she attends.

Many neatly piled stacks of red folders that say City College can also be found in her office. The folders contain information about specialized programs, student financial aid, and tutorial workshops.

On any given day, Heredia is either counseling students or conducting freshman orientations.

After receiving bachelors degrees in both Spanish literature and sociology and earning a masters degree in counseling from San Francisco State University, Heredia feels she more than knows her job requirements and limitations. Yet, her work ethics go beyond what you'd expect from the average community college counselor.

Heredia actually loves to help students solve their problems. She doesn't want a promotion unless she can still work directly with students. She readily gives solid advice on time management, study habits, course requirements, and four-year university matriculating programs or available financial aid.

Whether they are personal, scholastic, career or job-related, Heredia will take time to really listen to every student that is willing to open up to her. She prefers the larger picture of one's life be understood first, in order to focus on long-term solutions for individuals. Instead of giving out quick, simple textbook advice or standard forms just to send you on your way out of her office, Heredia makes it her business to find the programs, services and resources that will really be helpful to students.

"I can give students directions on how to develop and maintain their goals, encourage them to help themselves through any adversity while they attend City College classes and provide help with finding out the careers for which they might be suited," said Heredia warmly adding, "but students must follow through by themselves to achieve success."

She will also direct students to on-campus departments and non-profit community organizations that can help them focus on careers.

"You have to do the legwork and remain committed to your goal if you truly want life enhancing results," said Heredia, who at times becomes a mother figure for students, as well as, a guru.

Born in Mexico to parents that never finished high school, Heredia is the eldest of seven siblings. Her farm-working father moved the entire family to Northern California, where he passed away when she was only 16-years-old. No doubt this accounts for the posters and pictures of César Chávez on her office walls.

But the real heroine in Heredia's life is an elementary school teacher who showed her understanding and concern, and who encouraged her to want to go to college.

The teacher willingly nurtured and inspired young Heredia's character and personality and directed her to



Maria Heredia's counseling office in Conlan Hall, Room 205, is a mini museum that represents her cultural heritage.

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follow her own dream,

From this experience, Heredia learned the value of self-determination, self-sufficiency and compassion. Wanting to become a career counselor and help others, she became the only one in her family to finish college. That was in 1984.

Heredia first worked in student services at both Laney and Chabot colleges before coming to City College.

Now happily married to an educator administrator, Heredia is also a parent of three artistically creative children, all of whom live in the East Bay.

The eldest daughter attends San Jose State University and is a dancer in the Folkloric Ballet Troupe of

DeCarlos Moreno, an internationally acclaimed company that appeared at the Ethnic Dance Festival at the Palace of Fine Arts this summer.

Heredia's 14-year-old, saxophone-playing son enjoys track and pole-vaulting. Her 9-year-old likes to paint and plays soccer and baseball. Between her job and her family there is hardly any time left to enjoy her own hobbies that include reading and art.

But, she emits a true contentment and satisfaction, and she demonstrates an endless amount of inner strength, both mentally and emotionally.

Heredia likes Latin music, especially mariachi. Her favorite performers are

Carlos Santana and Vicente Fernandez of Mexico.

On campus, Heredia can also be found eating lunch in the student cafeteria with her friends — other counselors from work.

She enjoys community cultural events like Cinco de Mayo and Carnival. She attends her son's sport games regularly.

Heredia's favorite books are "100 Years of Solitude" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and "Joy Luck Club" by Amy Tan. She is a patron of "Yoshi's" a jazz club in Jack London Square and, at one time, she was a frequent patron of Cesar's Latin Palace.