Rogue Community College

NEWS RELEASE

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EDITORS: Digital photos available upon request

RCC names two outstanding students

Rogue Community College students Michael Costello and Katie Strong have been named recipients of the 2005 Outstanding Student Scholar award.

The Oregon Community College Association sponsors the annual honor. Recipients from the state’s 17 community colleges will attend a reception in Salem this spring with the college presidents, legislators and the governor. Each student also will receive a $1,000 scholarship to a four-year Oregon college or university. A committee of RCC instructors and college administrators selected the honorees from a field of 15 nominees based on academic accomplishments, college activities, and service.

Katie Strong, who attends RCC on the Redwood Campus near Grants Pass, has refused to let growing up in an unstable home life prevent her from reaching her goals. Things are good now, she said, but childhood was often turbulent.

“Education seems to be literally a moving target for me. During my four years of high school I attended four different schools,” she recalled. Strong graduated in 2003 from Grants Pass High School in the top 5 percent of her class, captained the varsity basketball team, and volunteered for many service projects. “I was also the first in four generations in my family not to drop out of school and get pregnant. And that was huge,” she said. In fall 2003 she enrolled at Western Oregon University.

“I excelled in my classes, but financial reality forced me to return at the end of one term,” Strong said. “It was hard to leave Western, but Rogue has a lot to offer. RCC is an affordable way to take pre-requisites and has many top quality instructors.”

Science instructors Dusty Rittenbach, John Salinas, and Jim Van Brunt nominated Strong, who has a 3.91 GPA, tutors in the TRIO program, and will transfer next fall to Southern Oregon University.

“My childhood is why I want to teach. Without the teachers who nurtured and mentored me I wouldn’t have succeeded this far. If I can touch other lives like my teachers did, that would be a great accomplishment,” Strong declared.

(over)
Mike Costello, who attends RCC on the Riverside Campus, Medford, was nominated by Joyce Harlow Graham, business technology instructor, and Sue Simmons, computer technician. Costello, a Gold Hill resident, has earned a 3.94 GPA and is majoring in digital graphic design and computer science multimedia – studies he will continue at SOU.

“Once I complete both degrees, I would like to incorporate them into my passion for photography and computers by starting my own photography and graphics business with my family,” Costello said. “I would also like to pursue a master’s degree in education so that I can share the importance of education with others,” he added.

Two auto accidents in the 1990s left Costello unable to work at any of the previous jobs he held before, and with a new daughter, he opted to spend several years as a stay-at-home dad.

“I wouldn’t trade that for anything. It was rough financially but it was the luckiest experience in the world, bonding and watching Sammi grow,” he said. When his daughter entered grade school, Costello decided it was time to also make a move. “I enrolled at Rogue Community College to earn a degree that would offer me employment opportunities,” he said.

Costello, who is now 37, says, “The best thing about RCC is they don’t make you feel like a number.” You know the instructors and many students, and it doesn’t feel overwhelming. I like the way teachers tailor the classes to what works for individuals, rather than use a cookie-cutter approach.”

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