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News from Merced College

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BOTH MOTHER AND SON GRADUATE FROM MERCED COLLEGE

Like mother, like son.

Well, that's not really how the saying goes, but for Diane Spork and her son Josh, it applies very well.

Diane and Josh are both graduating from Merced College this May. Diane, who works full-time at Merced College as a lead technician in the Admissions and Records office, is earning her associate of arts degree in Social and Behavioral Sciences, as is Josh.

Like mother, like son.

"Josh was dogging me for not having a degree," Diane said.

"No, you were just trying to one-up me," replied Josh.

One might get the idea that this playful back-and-forth is part of the success of this mother and son team. But despite the occasional ribbing between them, they are both proud of each other's accomplishments.

"My mom's life inspires me," Josh said. "I've learned a lot from her. She's made some mistakes in her life, but she's always made sure that I had other options."

It has been a tougher road for Diane, who at 44 has moved past a previous life of domestic violence and drug abuse. Originally from Prunedale in Monterey County, Diane settled in Los Banos in 1987. Divorce followed in 1990, and then her life spiraled out of control with a few years of self-destructive behavior.

“It was a bad scene for me,” she said. “Eventually, I knew that I had to take control of my life and that’s when I began to take classes at the Los Banos Campus.”

She was able to complete most of her units in Los Banos while working there part-time. She transferred to the main campus in Merced in 2000 and began working full-time in the EOP& office, a state funded program that assists low-income and educationally disadvantaged students.

“I began to think that my life was wide open,” she said. “I was getting older, but I knew I wanted to accomplish so much more in my life. And, I wanted to be a good role model for my son.”

Josh says his mom always told him that college was in his future too.

“Pretty much by the time I hit my teens I knew I was going to college,” Josh said. “My mom was always telling me that getting a college education would be the best thing I could do for myself.”

Diane is not only graduating with her son, she has the honor of giving the traditional student address. Her subject is herself, her struggles, her dreams, and her visions of her future. As she reflected on her own life in preparation for the speech, she realized that she had to offer others a message of victory and hope.

“While every person is different,” she wrote, “each person’s road to discovery involves triumph and failure, happiness and sadness, pride and humility. . . I feel blessed for teachers and wise peers like yourselves who have allowed me to benefit from your experience, your knowledge, and most of all, your support.”

Both of them are grateful for the supportive instructors and staff at Merced College.

“I’ve had a great experience here,” Josh said. “Learning is something that continues throughout your life. Never stop learning. That’s my message.”

Josh will transfer to UC Merced to study history and anthropology. He’d like to eventually earn a master’s degree and teach college students like himself.

Diane would like to use her life experiences to motivate others to succeed. Her speech is titled "Vision + Energy = Success."

My goal is to tell my fellow graduates to follow their dreams and don't give up," Diane said. "Always believe in yourself."

"Growth," she said, "comes from taking chances and facing one's fears."

"And," Josh said, "taking your life in your own hands."

The 46th annual Commencement Exercises will be held at Merced College on May 29.

SPORK GRADS 5/09