



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

PRESS RELEASE

May 14, 2018

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California Community Colleges Board of Governors Honors Four with 2018 Classified Employee of the Year Award

Annual award highlights dedication and hard work of thousands of college support staff

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The California Community Colleges Board of Governors today honored Sheila Dorsey-Freeman, James Forté, Bethann Robertson and Sherri Suarez as the 2018 California Community Colleges Classified Employees of the Year.

“Classified employees are the backbone of our system,” said California Community Colleges Board of Governors President Cecilia V. Estolano. “The work they do is instrumental in creating a positive educational experience for our students. On behalf of all 114 California community colleges, we thank them for the exceptional work they do for our system.”

Established in 2008, and first handed out in 2009, the award is presented annually to community college classified employees who demonstrate the highest level of commitment to professionalism and the community colleges. Recipients are nominated by members of their college or district community and endorsed by their local board of trustees. Representatives of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office and the Foundation for California Community Colleges select the award recipients. The winners must have a record of outstanding performance on the job, as well as a record of active participation on campus and in their respective communities.

The Classified Employee of the Year Award is supported through a grant from the Foundation for California Community Colleges. Each recipient will receive a \$500 cash award and a commemorative plaque.

The 2018 Award Winners:

Sheila Dorsey-Freeman, Imperial Valley College

Sheila Dorsey-Freeman has served as a dedicated Imperial Community College District employee for 26 years, with 23 of those years in the HR department.

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Ms. Dorsey-Freeman approaches her work at the college not as a job, but as part of her life and who she is. She supports every corner of the college campus through her work in HR, serving on various committees, along with participating in college activities and the community at large. During the absence of a chief human resources officer, Ms. Dorsey-Freeman stepped to the forefront to keep HR operations going smoothly by delivering consistency, expertise and leadership. Her research and knowledge of contracts was invaluable during district negotiations with the CSEA. On her own initiative, Ms. Dorsey-Freeman also drafted the district's EEO plan, recruitment and screening of administrative procedures, along with several other HR processes. As a member of the Association of Chief Human Resources Officers Association, active participant in the Liebert Cassidy Whitmore legal symposium and Southern 30 network, Imperial Valley College Foundation donor and active member of the KaliKrew-Youth travel basketball team, Ms. Dorsey-Freeman somehow finds time to be involved in the campus and the community while maintaining a high standard of excellence in her job.

James Forté, San Joaquin Delta College

In his 13 years in the San Joaquin Delta College District, James Forté has been a prime example of an ideal true-blue employee. He established trusting relationships by connecting with faculty, fellow classified professionals, administration and most importantly students. As a proud member of the Stockton community, Mr. Forté is deeply rooted in community activities serving as a liaison for the Latino youth conference planning committee, a member of the classified senate, African American Employee Council President, and volunteer mentor for My Brother's Keeper Academy of Stockton. Mr. Forté has enthusiastically offered his skills and support to ensure the success of programs like the AFFIRM Learning Community and the Passport to College program. No matter what situation arises, Mr. Forté always remains calm and professional seeking to find a solution that will be fair for all parties involved. Mr. Forté's dedication and passion to help anyone in need extends beyond expectations of an administrative assistant, whether it is his duty or not, you can count on him to simply do it because he knows that his one kind word, gesture or smile will make the difference in that person's day.

Bethann Robertson, Los Medanos College

Bethann Robertson has served the Contra Costa Community College District for 8 years and wears many hats at Los Medanos Community College, including her current roles as senior administrative Assistant, TEAS Test remediation Coordinator and Grant Project Manager. There is so much that attests to Ms. Robertson's exemplary skills. As the TEAS remediation coordinator for the nursing program, she supports each student with grace, compassion, concern and advice as they struggle through pre-nursing, up until they graduate and everything in between including helping students create resumes and sharpening interview skills. Ms. Robertson's involvement in her community and the Los Medanos campus life is evident through her work on the planning team, accreditation steering committee, the Stand-Down for Homeless Vets program, the Dozier Libbey High School Advisory Board, and countless collaborations for high school and college career fairs. Ms. Robertson serves as the unofficial face of the Nursing Program providing the public with efficient and organized information, presentations, and all aspects of event planning, including job fairs and advisory board meetings.

She takes on every difficult task with a smile and completes everything in a timely polished manner. Ms. Robertson gives this job her all and is the most valued member of the nursing department.

Sherri Suarez, Modesto Junior College

Sherri Suarez is the Facilities Duplicating and Mail Coordinator at Modesto Junior College and has served the Yosemite Community College District for 20 years. Ms. Suarez is the epitome of customer service and her customers include faculty, staff, students and the community. As an active member of the Facilities Council, Sherri serves as a representative for classified staff and as a professional expert by providing history and insight to the available facilities and those being taken down for maintenance. As part of a reorganization to save the college money, Sherri was asked to take on the additional responsibility of coordinating the Duplicating Department. Although she was not familiar with the department and their processes, she jumped right in and researched best practices, brought all accounts up to date and provided great support to the classified professionals working in the department. Her work ethic doesn't end on the MJC campus either. For many years, Ms. Suarez has volunteered as a caregiver for a gentleman from her church community who had no family to help him, along with taking on a leadership role as Chief Negotiator representing classified employees in the CSEA. Sherri embodies the California Community College mission by empowering the college through leadership, advocacy, and support with a strong commitment to contributing to the social, cultural and economic development and wellness of the community college system.

The California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation composed of 72 districts and 114 colleges serving 2.1 million students per year. Community colleges supply workforce training, basic skills education in English and math, and prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions. The Chancellor's Office provides leadership, advocacy and support under the direction of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. For more information about the community colleges, please visit <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/>, <https://www.facebook.com/CACommColleges>, or <https://twitter.com/CalCommColleges>.

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