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Rio Hondo College Holds Holiday Party for Children of Disadvantaged Students

WHITTIER, Calif. – Being a single parent can be financially challenging around the holidays. Add to that the costs and responsibilities of being a college student with scarce financial resources, and it can feel overwhelming.

That's why Rio Hondo College's Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) is hosting its 17th annual "Adopt-A-Child" event from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Dec. 17 at the Rio Hondo Café on campus.

The festive holiday luncheon – a Rio Hondo tradition – is an opportunity for economically disadvantaged students with young children to enjoy a holiday celebration, complete with a visit from Santa Claus, and to receive gifts courtesy of the Rio Hondo College community.

For some, it represents the only holiday celebration they may have.

The CARE program is part of the College's Extended Opportunity Program and Services office (EOP&S), dedicated to aiding students who face economic and educational challenges. CARE serves low-income, single-parent students who are challenged by attending school full time while raising children.

About 80 full-time student-parents with more than 120 children participate in the program. All of them are invited to attend the holiday event and receive gifts.

"Our CARE holiday event is one of many great examples of how Rio Hondo College supports students in ways that go beyond academics," said Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss.

Each year, the EOP&S office sets up a Christmas tree decorated with holiday cards from CARE students with photos and pertinent information about each child. Faculty, staff and community members are invited to "adopt" a child by taking a card from the "Giving

Tree” and returning a wrapped gift to place underneath. The gifts are given to the children at the holiday luncheon.

“It’s always a moving experience to see how this event lights up children’s faces and brings so much hope to families,” said Heba Griffiths, Director of EOP&S.

This year, former Rio Hondo student Antoinette Nolasco, who participated in the CARE program, will share her experiences during the lunch.

When Nolasco enrolled in Rio Hondo College in 2002 – a single mother of children ages 6, 5 and 3 – she was terrified.

“I didn’t even know how to format a paper,” she recalled. “I remember coming home from school to little ones who needed my attention, and having to do homework. That was hard.”

Rio Hondo’s CARE program provided Nolasco with priority enrollment, individual educational and personal counseling, financial assistance with books and school supplies, lunch vouchers and access to self-help workshops.

“Because of the CARE program, I was able to get the support I needed to get through college,” Nolasco said.

With that support, Nolasco earned an Associate of Arts degree from Rio Hondo, a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services from University of Phoenix, and a Master of Social Work from Azusa Pacific University.

“I used to have a social worker. Now I am one,” she said.

Media are welcome to attend and cover CARE’s annual holiday lunch.

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