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November 7, 2011
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Rancho Santiago Community College District Helps
Veterans Transition to Civilian and Student Life**
Soldiers to Scholars Event Raises \$100,000 for Veterans Resource Centers

(Santa Ana)—As President Obama promises to bring home the remaining 40,000 U.S. troops in Iraq by year's end, many ponder what's in store for them upon their return. With unemployment in California currently at 11.9 percent, many veterans will look to community colleges to arm them for civilian life and work.

Among Orange County's returning veterans is 31-year-old Silverado resident Wylie McGraw. After five years with the U.S. Army and three tours of duty in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, McGraw arrived at Santa Ana College (SAC) feeling lost and confused about the direction he should take as a new civilian.

"It took me two years and applying to four colleges to get over the anxiety of transitioning into college life when I enrolled in the fire technology program at Santa Ana College," said McGraw. "The military doesn't really teach you how to be a civilian again. When you are used to living a disciplined, planned out life, it's a little scarier than what they mentioned. I suffered from anxiety issues; I didn't eat; I didn't sleep; I didn't want to fail. I worried about balancing taking five classes, working, and taking care of my personal life."

Today he is grateful for the services that the college's Veterans Resource Center (VRC) offers. In fact, as a work-study student at the VRC, McGraw has found his passion in helping other veterans—work he hopes to continue after graduating from SAC. He personally has gone to the VRC for referrals for help with financial aid when his GI Bill benefits were delayed for months and he needed a gap loan to help cover his rent, pay his bills, and buy food. He says that it's important for veteran students to know that "someone's got their back when the system does not."

Santa Ana College's Veterans Resource Center stands ready to help hundreds of veterans as they transition from military to college life. The VRC opened in 2010 as California community

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colleges faced unprecedented cuts. With no available funding from state or federal resources, the college managed to put a program together without any real budget and with shared resources allowing its doors to be open to service veterans.

“It’s important for our veteran students to jump right in and maximize the benefits that the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides them,” said Elyse Chaplin, Ph.D., SAC associate dean.

“Navigating the GI education benefits system can be a daunting experience. And, student veterans only get 36 months of financial support for tuition and fees, books and supplies, as well as a monthly housing allowance. That’s not a lot of time to complete a college education. Our fundraising efforts and the community’s support are invaluable components to supporting our vets.”

Many veteran students struggle to stretch financial benefits to cover all their college and living expenses. At the same time, they may be dealing with emotional, physical, and psychological scars left by wartime experiences. It takes access to a range of support services to ensure that needs are met.

Fortunately, Rancho Santiago Community College District’s Veterans Resource Centers just got a needed financial shot in the arm. Thanks to the Soldiers to Scholars Reception held in mid-September, \$100,000 was raised to be divided between the VRCs at Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College. The title sponsor, which generously donated \$50,000, was SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union. Additional sponsors included Townsend Public Affairs; Seville Construction Services; Bank of the West; the Nohra Company; and Kinsell, Newcomb & De Dios, Inc.

Santa Ana College’s Veterans Resource Center (VRC) offers the following services to approximately 375 veterans each semester:

- Access to a Certifying Official to assist veterans with accessing Veterans Assistance (VA) educational benefits,
- Specialized academic counseling to develop educational plans to meet VA benefit requirements,
- Individualized counseling for our veteran students by a licensed social worker through the “Drop Zone,”
- Priority registration for veterans discharged within the last four years,
- Customized orientation and academic skills workshops for veterans,
- Veteran-to-veteran assistance with academic, personal, and vocational issues,
- Disabled Students Program and Services provides academic support and advisement to veterans who have acquired disabling conditions, including acquired brain injury, hearing loss, physical disabilities, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychological and learning disabilities,

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- Linkages to on- and off-campus organizations, psycho-educational workshops, and support groups,
- Community study area where veterans stop in to do their homework, use computers and printers,
- Opportunity to apply and work as a Veterans Assistance work-study student, and
- Short-term loans and/or grants through the Comunidad Latina bank on campus that help veterans pay fees or purchase books.

Santiago Canyon College has submitted an application for approval through the California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education to be eligible to provide educational and training programs authorized by the GI Bill. The college anticipates that its Veterans Services will be fully operational by spring 2012. A Veterans Orientation is planned for Friday, November 18 when students will learn about the services that will be available.

For more information about the Santa Ana College Veteran Resource Center, call (714) 564-6050 and for information about Santiago Canyon College's veteran support services, contact the college's Financial Aid Office at (714) 628- 4876.

EDITOR'S NOTE: SAC's VRC is celebrating Veterans' Day on Thursday November 10 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the VRC located in Building U-103.

About the Rancho Santiago Community College District

The mission of the Rancho Santiago Community College District (RSCCD) is to respond to the educational needs of an ever-changing community and to provide programs and services that reflect academic excellence. Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College are public community colleges of RSCCD, which serve the residents of Anaheim Hills, East Garden Grove, Irvine, Orange, Santa Ana, Tustin and Villa Park. Both colleges provide education for academic transfer and careers, courses for personal and professional development, customized training for business and industry, and programs to train nurses, firefighters and law enforcement personnel.

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