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Grossmont Student Honored as Young Luminary of the Year; History Professor Finalist for Teacher of the Year

EL CAJON – Student Esau Cortez credits Grossmont College with changing his life, but he is the one making an impact in student government.

Cortez was chosen as the 2013 Young Luminary during the second annual San Diego Latino Champion Awards Ceremony, sponsored by U-T San Diego.

“I want to thank Grossmont for helping me become someone I didn’t know I could be,” said Cortez, 19, of Santee.

Carlos Contreras, Ph.D., a history professor at Grossmont College was one of four finalists for the 2013 Teacher of the Year award at the Latino Champions event held recently at SeaWorld. Juan Mora of Serra High School was the award winner.

“It was an honor to have been recognized,” Contreras said. “Everything we do we do for our students who inspire us every day to bring our ‘A’ game to the classroom.”

At Grossmont College, Cortez is vice president of the Interclub Council and executive secretary of student legislation for the Associated Students of Grossmont College, Inc., the student governing organization. He is director of public outreach for Region X of the Student Senate for California Community Colleges. Cortez is working to establish a Latino caucus for the region, with the goal of inspiring Latino students to attend college, and will serve as its first president. Nine community colleges in San Diego and Imperial counties comprise Region X, and the Student Senate represents 2.4 million community college students statewide.

Cortez’s volunteer service included a recent project with Noah Homes, which provides assisted living and services for developmentally disabled adults, with a local hospice, at foster youth fairs and at community events sponsored by the local office of state Sen. Joel Anderson, R-Alpine.

“Esau is one of the many wonderful students at Grossmont and we are privileged to play a role in helping to develop their full potential and achieve their educational goals,” said Grossmont College President Sunita V. Cooke, Ph.D. “I am very proud of him for attaining this honor and of Dr. Carlos Contreras, who was a finalist.”

Contreras has taught history at Grossmont since 1998 and formerly was chair of the Department of History at the college. He has been the recipient of the college’s Excellent in Teaching Award and was chosen in the fall to participate in the American Historical Association’s “Bridging Cultures at Community Colleges” project, a three-year endeavor to reframe the origins of the United States within a broad geographical and chronological context.

Contreras began his working life on his parents’ farm in Mexico, but immigrated with his family to Texas when he was in the sixth grade. He earned his doctorate at UCLA and has volunteered as a mentor for low-income, first-time college students and with educational groups to foster diversity, equity and inclusion on school campuses and in the hiring of faculty.

College and Community Relations

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