



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Santa Ana College Alumnus Thanh Minh Nguyen, M.D., Ph.D., Named 2009 California Community College Distinguished Alumnus

(Santa Ana)— After being inducted in June 2009 into the Santa Ana College Foundation Alumni Hall of Fame, Thanh Minh Nguyen, M.D., Ph.D., (class of 1988) has been named one of four recipients of the 2009 California Community College Distinguished Alumni Awards.

Nguyen will be honored at the Community College League of California’s Annual Convention and Partner Conference slated for November 18-21 in Burlingame. The prestigious award recognizes and honors the accomplished professionals whose attendance at a California community college helped them achieve their educational and career goals and serve their communities.

Nguyen is a pediatric endocrinologist whose career in science and medicine started when he enrolled in a pre-calculus class in what was then Rancho Santiago College at the age of 16. With no high school diploma or G.E.D. and very limited English skills, excelling in his studies was no easy task. At his young age, he had already faced numerous obstacles that made even the most daunting task seem within reach.

After surviving a treacherous boat crossing from Vietnam to Thailand, Nguyen and his family were apprehended by pirates who prepared to kill them all. One of the pirates then recognized a man in the same boat who had shared food with him in prison, and set them all free. “I was spared for a reason,” says Nguyen.

Later, Nguyen was taught textbook English by missionaries in the refugee camp where he, his four siblings, and his parents stayed for two years before emigrating to the United States. Understanding and speaking the language in class, however, initially posed serious obstacles to his academic success. By pre-reading the chapters in his pre-calculus class and studying a dictionary to improve his English vocabulary on the bus ride between his home in Santa Ana and campus, then working with his professor, Nguyen aced his first class, setting him up to graduate with highest honors and transfer to “a school I knew about only because my professor gave me

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the information and encouraged my family and me to explore the possibilities of pursuing a bachelor's degree," he says.

He graduated from Santa Ana College with an A.S. in biological sciences with highest honors. Then, he transferred to University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) where he graduated cum laude in 1991. He went on to the Ohio State University (OSU) College of Medicine and Public Health – Medical Scientist Program, where he earned an M.D. and a Ph.D. in pharmacology in 2002. After completing a residency in the Dept. of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine and the Fellowship Program in Baylor's Dept. of Pediatrics Endocrinology and Metabolism Fellowship Program, he joined the Nemours Children's Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla., where he is a pediatric endocrinologist and on staff at Wolfson Children's Hospital in Jacksonville.

"My success started by enrolling Santa Ana College; I not only got a strong foundation in math, English, philosophy and science, I had good role models who gave me the help I needed to succeed," says Nguyen.

And Nguyen, in turn, has been a role model and tutor for hundreds of students starting in the learning center at Santa Ana College and continuing at UCLA and OSU.

"I have tutored minorities who are worried that they had been admitted to the college because of the color of their skin. I told them, 'If that is the case, why does it matter? Just make sure you do your best when you walk through that door so that it remains open for others to follow.'"

Today, he specializes in the treatment of children with Type 1 (Juvenile) Diabetes. He explains, "If you can manage this disease, you give children a chance to achieve and become whomever and almost whatever they want to become. I tell children, 'Diabetes is part of your life, but not the whole of your life. You can control it, or it can control you, and I am here with your parents to help you get all the skills you need to control it and live the life you want to live.'"

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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