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Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: Honoring three leaders who have changed the odds

May 6, 2023



Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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Hancock's impact has undeniable reach in the region. As a 100-year-old institution, the college has positively affected hundreds of thousands of lives, and has been an economic driver in the region for decades.

I talk a lot about this breadth when I'm out in the community, and now it's time to celebrate the depth of the college's impact through the accomplishments of notable individuals.

To celebrate these achievements, the college is hosting a new signature celebration to properly acknowledge how individual alumni, faculty, staff, and supporters of the college are changing the odds in their communities.

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The celebration is called the Hancock Honors. And each year on the Saturday after Labor Day, we will invite the community to campus to honor several people who are truly changing the odds in their community.

The inaugural Hancock Honors is set for Sept. 9.

This week we announced the inaugural honorees, who we will acknowledge this fall. Two are familiar names in North County, and a third is an example of a student who moved on from Hancock and is making a difference on a national stage — literally.

Our first honoree is the late Patty Boyd, who left the college a transformative gift that built the recital hall in the college's new Fine Arts Complex. Patty studied at Santa Maria Junior College, moved away to continue her musical studies, and then returned to Santa Maria to teach piano both privately and as a part-time instructor at Hancock.

Her legacy in the community is long and broad: she taught piano for over 50 years and well into her late 80s.

Upon her passing, she ensured that the arts would endure into perpetuity at Hancock with a \$10 million gift for the recital hall, a \$2 million endowment to support our music program, and a \$1 million endowment for PCPA.

For the work she did during her life, and the legacy she left us forever, we will celebrate Ms. Boyd as our very first honoree.

Our second honoree knew Patty Boyd quite well, and played an important role in her gift to the college. Ann Foxworthy Lewellen served Hancock as our seventh president, and is still the only woman to hold that job permanently.

During her 13-year tenure, she oversaw the construction and opening of the Lompoc Valley Center, significantly expanded the use of technology, and became an effective leader across all of northern Santa Barbara County.

Her leadership continued even after retiring in 2005. She has remained an active community leader in the Santa Ynez Valley. Most recently, she led the \$5 million campaign during the pandemic to restore Solvang TheaterFest. Today, the refurbished facility is a testament to her commitment, endurance, and grit.

Our third honoree — Tommy Soulati Shepherd — is a musician, actor, playwright, composer, and educator who is making a considerable impact in the area of youth empowerment.

He won a GRAMMY Award this year for Best Children’s Album, after being nominated twice before.

Tommy is a rare double PCPA alum from the 1990s who completed both the acting and technical theater programs. In 2007, as a new father, he wanted to engage youth in the issues that will affect them, so he co-founded a multi-generational musical group called the Alphabet Rockers, which includes his now-teenage son and other young people as writers and performers.

The Rockers address issues like racism and gender bias and teach about creating love and community, all of which are critical to changing the odds for young people from marginalized communities.

We’re excited about the future of the Hancock Honors, as we have no shortage of deserving folks from across our district to honor for their good work in the world.

But for now, I invite you to join us in September as we honor these three luminaries, who have changed the odds for those they serve.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is Superintendent/President of Allan Hancock College. For more information on sponsorship opportunities for the Hancock Honors, go to www.hancockcollege.edu/honors.

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