

May 2, 2011

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

This week, the story of Chuck Schmitt who worked for many years in RCC's Disabled Student Services.

It is 4 years and 45 weeks until RCC's 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

RCC's 'true local hero' remembered

◆ Schmitt's dedication and courage celebrated

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Chuck Schmitt spent 41 years in a wheelchair, his arms and legs paralyzed after a horrific swimming accident when he was just 15. But Schmitt never let obstacles slow him down. Students, staff and administrators at Riverside Community College knew Schmitt as the big guy with the gray beard whose personal experience provided first-hand insights to his job working with disabled college kids. From his familiar perch at the Chavez Administration Building, people looked to Schmitt for campus directions and where to get add cards and blue books or a parking pass. He was regarded as a general all-around greeter. Schmitt died March 14 from pneumonia. He was 55. A memorial service in his honor drew more than 250. "One interesting thing that Chuck said was that he thought he became a better person after becoming paralyzed because he met so many good people over his four decades in a wheelchair," Paula McCroskey, coordinator of Disabled Student Services, said. "He was known as genuine and caring person. As an educator, he was truly committed to seeing other students succeed." McCroskey first met Schmitt 15 years ago, when he attended RCC as a re-entry student. "I found it so interesting, his telling me about his life after his accident," she said. "We became good friends soon after. Someone will take his position, but never take his place."

Schmitt graduated from RCC and University of California, Riverside, with honors. In 1989, he came back to the Riverside campus, serving as academic counselor to disabled students. "I first ran across Chuck about nine years ago when a student was raising a financial aid issue," Susan Avery, Financial Aid specialist, said. "Since that day, we became good buddies," she added. "I went through some problems at home and he was always there for me as a wonderful listener. I will miss him dearly, but I was so glad that I knew him as a special person."

RCC Counselor Alta Hester remembers the day Schmitt visited her in the hospital, nine years ago. "Chuck was my first hospital visitor to boost my spirits," she said. "I understand why he was so popular among students. Chuck really cared about assisting students with their questions or problems."

He rarely talked of his own medical problems, despite suffering a wide range of health issues in recent years, Hester said. Schmitt's influence reached beyond school boundaries. He worked with Riverside city officials to bring easier accessibility to the disabled. His efforts made possible the installation of wheelchair ramps at City Hall and walkways at the Martha McLean Park. He also worked to make city buses and vans more accessible to the handicapped. "(Chuck) knew how to get his point across in a diplomatic way," Greg Gilbert, a colleague, said. Riverside Mayor Ron Loveridge's comments about Schmitt were brief. "He was a true local hero," Loveridge said. RCC will establish a student scholarship in Schmitt's honor. Schmitt is survived by his wife, Becky, his father, Jacob Thorson and two nieces.



Chuck Schmitt

"Viewpoints"
April 6, 2000

From 1985-2000, Chuck Schmitt was a familiar figure at Riverside City College. Paralyzed for most of his life after a swimming accident, he earned his four-year degree and worked as an academic counselor to disabled RCC students. In his 1998 Faculty Lecture, Clarence Romero (Associate Professor Psychology 1987-date), said of Schmitt, "(He is) a man of dignity, principle, commitment, values and meaning . . . he's my hero".



The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC's 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District's Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote "the book" about RCC's history. "Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History" is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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