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PCC Southwest Campus graduate is true testament to perseverance

DURANGO – No one at Pueblo Community College’s Southwest Campus questions Raylene Charley’s tenacity or will to succeed. She faced several obstacles and conquered them all to earn an Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education

For overcoming life’s obstacles, Raylene Charley will receive the 2009 PCC Alumni Student Recognition Award during the Southwest Campus’ commencement ceremony scheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday (May 3) at Fort Lewis College’s Community Concert Hall. The award is based on the dedication and commitment necessary to earn a degree despite life’s challenges.

The award is more than well deserved. Raylene attended school while working full time and undergoing serious health and family issues. She has overcome these obstacles while working two jobs to support her family at home, earning a 3.61 GPA in the process.

Raylene moved to Colorado from the reservation in Castle Butte, Arizona, and the 26-year-old is the first in her immediate family to graduate from college. Navajo is Raylene’s native language, and she said English was her most difficult subject at PCC.

“College English was difficult because I had to learn a lot and practice,” she noted. Her favorite subject was math because “it is challenging, and the thought process that math requires is fun.” Raylene’s fondest memories of PCC include meeting new friends, interacting with her teachers and enjoying Durango’s natural beauty.

After living and working in Durango for the past seven years and earning her degree, Raylene now plans to pursue a career working with children and families. Currently, she is a Tri-County Head Start toddler lead teacher at the Roberta Shirley Center in Durango. “I love watching the toddlers grow and develop. They run and laugh and interact even though they have moments of screaming and crying,” she said.

Raylene credits her grandmother, who passed away this semester, for inspiring her to pursue both a modern college education and value her traditional culture. She plans to

take this modern education back to her reservation in Arizona to help children and families there.

Raylene's instructors recommended her for the 2009 PCC Alumni Student Recognition Award.

"Raylene worked in our front office as a work/study student, and her professionalism and work ethic were exemplary, said Lisa Barrett, Early Childhood Education instructor and Coordinator of Student Services. "Beyond that, she's worked tirelessly to become a teacher and a counselor. She deserves this honor."

Marty Dyer, PCC math and astronomy instructor, said, "Raylene was a great asset to the PCC front office, always displaying professionalism, and modeling for other students the traits that will enable their success in life."

Kurt Umbhau, PCC English instructor, said, "Raylene is an inspirational student because she was unwavering in earning her degree. She's overcome some of the major challenges that life can deliver while pursuing her college education. Her perseverance, reliability, and work ethic are exactly what I expect from top achievers."

Raylene is currently deciding whether to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree at Fort Lewis College or Colorado State University.

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Founded in 1933, Pueblo Community College is a premier teaching institution focused on providing academic and service excellence to help its students acquire the 21st Century skills needed to better their lives. An educational and technological leader, PCC fosters economic development and utilizes strong partnerships in the communities it serves through its Pueblo, Fremont and Southwest campuses.