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Moraga resident honored by Saint Mary's College

By Michael Lupacchino



Millicent McCormack Photo Mary Poppingo

Longtime Moraga resident Millicent McCormack will be honored on Saturday, Jan. 27 at Saint Mary's College during the 2018 Distinguished Alumni Awards. Each year the college's Alumni Association honors deserving alumni and friends by bestowing six different awards for outstanding service to the SMC community. McCormack is this year's Honorary Alumna, an award given to friends of the college in recognition of outstanding service and dedication to the mission of Saint Mary's College.

McCormack will be honored along with Alumnus of the Year, Rand Morimoto, PhD. A tech industry pioneer, and founder and president of Convergent Computing, Morimoto has served the Clinton, Bush and Obama Administrations as a Y2K, cybersecurity and cyberterrorism advisor. The Emerging Leader Award will be presented to Yusuf Nessary, the founder of Zam Water; a humanitarian organization working to increase access to clean water, quality education and sustainable farming globally.

In addition to her service to Saint Mary's, McCormack has been actively involved in the Lamorinda community for decades. She was the first student teacher at Donald Rheem Elementary, and taught first grade in Moraga for

42 years. McCormack taught at the Rheem School and at Camino Pablo, where she retired from teaching in 2004. "I was known for bringing Irish Folklore to Moraga, introducing it to all of my first grade classes," says McCormack. "My name is synonymous with Leprechauns in this town!" Although McCormack was teaching in Moraga in the 1960s, it wasn't until 1973 when she and her late husband, Thomas, moved into a brand new house in Moraga after spending time in Walnut Creek and then Martinez.

When the couple moved to Moraga, they became members of the local Catholic Church, Saint Monica's. Although the parish was established in 1965, construction on the church's current location off Canyon Road wasn't complete until 1974. As a result, the McCormacks and the other parishioners worshipped in the Saint Mary's College Chapel. McCormack notes, "Because the church hadn't finished construction, our daughter, Kathleen, was baptized in the Saint Mary's College Chapel." Twenty-two years later, their daughter would go on to graduate from SMC with a degree in business in 1996.

As residents of Moraga and members of Saint Monica's, the McCormacks developed a strong relationship with Saint Mary's College, especially with Brother Mel Anderson. Thomas McCormack, who was also an educator, approached Anderson in the late '70s about establishing extension courses at the school for teachers, nurses, accountants, and other professionals in need of continuing education credits. "My husband was very entrepreneurial," says McCormack. "He noticed that I, as a school teacher, needed so many credits each year, and thought 'If other colleges and universities can offer extension credit, why not Saint Mary's?'"

Thomas McCormack, working with Saint Mary's, established the California Field Studies extension courses for professional growth, of which he served as an associated director. The McCormacks became very involved with the college and continued to be long after the field studies program ended as the college phased out extension credits in 2005. Millicent McCormack joined the SMC Guild in the 1990s, but became very active once she retired from teaching. Since 2004, she has served as the Guild's publicity chair—a job that has her continuously interacting with businesses and community members in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda.

Established in 1939, the SMC Guild is a women's group that raises money for scholarships through monthly events such as an annual Christmas Luncheon, a Bridge and Bunco night, and a spring fashion show. Aside from building community relations as the publicity chair, McCormack is incredibly passionate about the Guild's mission of raising scholarship funding for students in need. It is her dedication to the Guild that landed her this year's Honorary Alumnus/Alumna Award. Assistant Vice President for Alumni & Community Engagement Mary Poppingo also serves as the Guild liaison. She notes, "Millicent's passion and enthusiasm for the SMC Guild and for Saint Mary's College is infectious. Anyone who meets her sees immediately her commitment to our students. At events, the room lights up when Millie arrives and the fun begins."

All of the 2018 award winners were notified in early December of their honors. When McCormack first heard the news, she was stunned. "I was shocked, and overwhelmed. I had no idea of its importance and it took a

week to set in," says McCormack. Her zest and passionate support for the Saint Mary's College community was even evident as she told friends and family. "My husband's whole family are either Santa Clara or USF supporters. I couldn't wait to tell them all about the award I will be receiving at 'little Saint Mary's over here.'"

Tickets to the Distinguished Alumni Awards are still available and open to the public. For more information, please visit stmarys-ca.edu/alumniawards.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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