



The stage of the 2023 Mesa Community College Hall of Fame with a table with each award to be given out on Nov. 2. (Photo courtesy of Mesa Community College)

### NEWS

## **Mesa Community College celebrated 13 honorees part of 2023 Hall of Fame class**

Rey Covarrubias Jr. 11/09/2023

Mesa Community College honored 13 of their own alumni, faculty and staff at the 2023 Hall of Fame on Nov. 2 at the Southern and Dobson campus theater for their contributions to the college's more than half a century legacy.

The Hall of Fame ceremony was hosted by Marcy Snitzer of MCC Institutional Advancement who introduced each presenter for individual award categories, along with college president Tammy Robinson.

The MCC staff and faculty honored at the event mingled with each other at a pre-event reception held outside the MCC art gallery.

Around 7:00 p.m, honorees made their way to the theater's stage to watch MCC's 8th Hall of Fame ceremony where they were met with an at-capacity attendance.

“The achievements of those in the MCC Hall of Fame are hallmarks of what this community college has offered to its students and the community for more than half a century,” said Robsinon, before Snitzer welcomed the first category presenter for the evening.

MCC athletic director John Mulhern welcomed the first honoree, Douglas Lewis, for the “Outstanding MCC Athlete” award which celebrated contributions a student athlete has made to the MCC athletics legacy of being an all-academic National Junior College Athletic Association school.

Lewis was a basketball player for MCC in the mid 80s, working his way to starting point guard for the conference championship team during the 1986-87 season.

Each honoree gave a short acceptance speech before being awarded the Hall of Fame trophy made of a fusion of blue and green belts engulfed in a cone of glimmery clear glass.

“[I] never thought this was possible, never thought about it cause the only thing I thought about is winning, winning was the most important thing, my teammates, my coaches, and more importantly I just wanted to put my best effort out there and leave it out there and let things happen for themselves,” said Lewis.

Lewis and all of the other honorees stopped on stage to take a photo with Snitzer and Robinson.

Mulhern also gave an award to Sarah Moravitz, a 1996 regional soccer champion at MCC. “I’m super proud to still be in the community, in education just down the road at Tempe High where I get to talk about MCC to my students and

student athletes and hope to inspire them to go on to the next level,” said Moravitz

Kieth Smith of the 1973 football team was also given an award but was unable to attend the ceremony.

MCC all-time top baseball scorer, Thomas Watkins, was presented the award for his time at MCC in which he was on the 1998 Region I championship team.

“It’s an honor to be a part of this institution,” said Wakins.

Brandi Steinke was the next athlete to be awarded for her time at MCC, where she became Female Athlete of the Year in 2005 for her work as the captain for the women’s basketball team.

Steinke reflected on the immense impact her coaches had on her time at MCC. “All the staff and the players I got to play with, it was just an amazing experience and I absolutely loved it,” said Steinke.

Mulhern then presented the “Outstanding MCC Coaches” award to John Guerrero, who got the women’s golf team to a 17-18 record in 2001. Guerrero later took the men’s golf team to win the 2017 NJCAA Division II national championship.

“Today I received 12 emails from parents of past players thanking me and congratulating me, and there are parents here attending tonight of a young lady that I actually coached in 2003, and their parents are here tonight driving from Glendale so when I hear those comments and I see these faces in the crowd, then I know that I’ve hit Hall of Fame status,” said Guerrero.

The next category presenter was introduced as MCC life science faculty Pam Harrison, who announced the honorees for the “Excellence in Teaching” award for full-time faculty members who have exceeded the college’s classroom expectations.

Carole Drachler was given the first award in the category for her work as an art professor and historian at MCC.

“Teaching at Mesa Community College was one of the greatest joys of my life. I love the students, art history and the faculty,” said Drachler in her acceptance speech.

Next was Kara Thompson of MCC theater production, who was unable to speak at the ceremony and had box office coordinator and later honoree, Marisa Estrada, accept the award in her honor.

Estrada was the next honoree introduced by Paul Hickey of the College Technology Services, who presented her the award for “Distinguished MCC Staff,” which honored non faculty staff members who have helped the college grow and excel at service students.

Estrada was honored for her dedication to promoting and overseeing MCC theater, music, and performing arts events.

“Working for the college for the past few decades has led to some amazing opportunities and friendships,” said Estrada.

The final presenter was introduced as MCC’s philanthropy development officer, Julie Ellsworth, who would present the “Alumni Achievement” award and the service honoree.

The service honoree was awarded to Monica Torres, who after MCC, went on to become the founder and business owner of NXT Generation Mortuary Support.

“I’d like to especially thank MCC for offering me the opportunity to gain an education in mortuary science and go on to teach others and educate the public and professionals in a subject

that is not only taboo but difficult to talk about,” said Torres.

The “Alumni Achievement” award celebrated former students who went on to achieve professional success in their chosen field that they first entered at MCC.

Gary Ernst was then given the first titular alumni award and was celebrated for his more than 38 years leading Arizona high

school teams to numerous championships and a total of 943 wins.

“I was here 56 years ago, and Mesa Community College was out in the middle of nowhere and we all wondered why they built this school so far from everything,” said Ernest, reflecting on how he’s seen the college grow into the entity it is today.

Michele Johnson was the next honoree for the category, and was celebrated for her work as a trial attorney for clients like Apple, J.P. Morgan, and Kohls. Johnson previously served as the Mesa Legend’s sport editor in the early 90’s.

Johnson, who was homeschooled before her time at MCC, said “I was out of practice with humans, crowds, and people and understanding what high school was and understanding what everyone else had experienced.”

Johnson elaborated that professors like her political science teacher, Mr. Avila, accepted her without judging her past.

The last award of the night for the category was given to Mike VanZutphen, who has directed sports organizations like the United States Professional tennis Association and the Arizona Special Olympics.

“I really hoped in my career that the people that I have coached or trained, I’ve left a little bit of me through this college,” said VanZutphen, who reflected that he wouldn’t be where he is now if it wasn’t for scholarships he had at his time at MCC.



The 2023 Mesa Community College Hall of Fame at the Southern and Dobson theater on Nov. 2, 2023. (From left to right) Back row: John Guerrero, Douglas Lewis, Kara Thompson, Mike VanZutphen, Gary Ernst, Sarah Moravitz, Michele Johnson, Thomas Watkins. Front row: Marisa Estrada, Carole Drachler, Monica Torres. (Photo courtesy of Mesa Community College)

President Robinson gave final remarks to an audience that applauded the final honoree being given their award.

“Mesa Community College can’t thank you all enough for the hard work that you do in the community, there are not enough words and enough thank you for the years of service and the statistics that we witnessed tonight,” said Robinson.

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in learning and sharing the diverse cultural and natural wonders of the state.

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