

Family helps CSUN open doors wider to the deaf

By Carmen Ramos Chandler
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For Tom Serrato, the endowment he and his family have established at California State University, Northridge, is all about opening doors and presenting opportunities.

Serrato's son, Michael, graduated from Northridge in May with a degree in political science. Serrato is convinced that college would not even have been an option for his deaf son if it had not been for the support and encouragement Michael received from mentors, teachers and interpreters while growing up.

"But for hundreds of deaf and hard-of-hearing children, that kind of support isn't there. Just getting through the obstacles and lack of understanding they and their families encounter every day can be hard enough. College isn't even on the radar," he said.

"My son was lucky. He had family and teachers and a whole lot of people behind him. What about those who don't?"

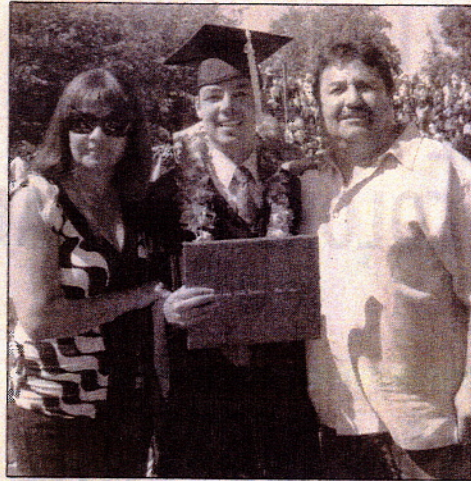
Serrato and his wife, Julia, have created the Serrato Family Endowment at CSUN to provide outreach and support to deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their families to encourage the students' participation and success in college.

The couple, who live in Diamond Bar, established the endowment with an initial gift of \$10,000 to the university, and pledged to contribute an additional \$40,000 over the next four years.

CSUN became the first mainstream university in the country to provide sign-language interpreters for deaf students when it established its National Center on Deafness in 1964. The center has since become a national model.

NCOD has served more than 2,500 students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the past 44 years.

The center provides communication access, leadership opportunities, scholarships, academic advisement, tutoring and direct communication classes.



Julia, Michael and Tom Serrato are seen at Michael's graduation ceremony at CSUN. The Serrato family has created an endowment at CSUN for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Michael said he realizes he was very lucky to have the support of his family and others as he pursued his dream of a college education. He would love to see other deaf and hard-of-hearing young people get the same opportunities.

"The endowment for NCOD for deaf youth is truly a great thing," he said of his parents' gift to the university. "I know it means a lot to me. I want to see deaf youth have the opportunity to improve their quality of life by having access to education, to be able to socialize with one another and be part of recreational achievement programs.

"I had a good education and resources while growing up, and I want other deaf kids to have that, too."

For more information, e-mail CSUN's National Center on Deafness at ncod@csun.edu.

Carmen Ramos Chandler handles public relations for CSUN. She posted this story to The Valley hub on valleynews.com.