

Silver Spur, March 6, 2010 Comments by Dianne Van Hook

Good evening saddlepals! It is a pleasure to be here with you tonight at the Autry National Center of the American West. This is the perfect venue to celebrate the accomplishments and service of two people we are blessed to count among our closest friends at College of the Canyons – Gary and Myrna.

It's such a treat to be back here at the Autry where we started the Silver Spur award 20 years ago. It hardly seems like it's been that long ago that we honored country music legend Cliffie Stone as our first awardee. I have so many great memories of Cliffie and with all of our winners, but it's more than nostalgia that makes this a special venue. The story of the Condis is deeply rooted in the American West. And the history of the College of the Canyons is very Western in nature. And not just because our Valencia campus was once a field full of cows, or the occasional herd of sheep that liked to congregate where the library now stands.

The growth of the American West is marked by innovation, energy, creativity and a spirit of opportunity – the same things for which the college has become known and have inspired us to become one of the best colleges anywhere. Now, 40 years after we began serving the Santa Clarita Valley, we are continuing to surge forward to create new opportunities and build on the momentum we see in our community. We're modern-day pioneers, blazing new trails and pushing onward to see what's over the horizon.

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While we don't always know what road we will take, or what trail we will blaze, we do know that we must risk doing, we must imagine where we want to be and we must go there with an entrepreneurial and innovative spirit – taking the unknown on as opportunities to start a new enterprise that will help our community. While we may not be looking for gold in river beds and gold mines, we are aggressive and partnering to bring millions of dollars of new funding to our college district each year; and

We are lucky we can do that – in Santa Clarita Clarita.

As supporters of College of the Canyons, you in the audience deserve credit for providing the energy and initiative that fuels our development and forward motion. Just as folks had to work together in the Old West to get things done, we rely on our volunteers and donors to help scout out what is ahead and create an environment where people can pursue opportunities, take the next steps, open doors and build it together. Whether you have been a friend of COC for a short time or for many years, you can be proud of the fact that this educational community is special indeed because you all demonstrate day in and day out those relationships, courage, and spirit that forged new communities in the West, built our college and all that we so comfortably enjoy in Santa Clarita.

Our honorees tonight epitomize what we love about Santa Clarita. They have done much through their volunteer efforts to help us reach the heights we have attained as a college in recent years. I've had the privilege of knowing the Condis for more than a decade since they became involved with the College of the Canyons Foundation. In reflecting on the Condis, and their impact on our community, I can't help but think about how they have proven time and again that actions do in fact speak louder than words.

Gary tells a story that dates to when he and Myrna were first married. They spent the summer working in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Gary learned what has proven to be a lifelong lesson.

His new father-in-law, a successful entrepreneur who owned and managed several businesses in town, came home from work, quickly changed clothes, and dashed out the door on his way to a community event. As he left, he turned and told Gary, "That's what you do when you live in a community. You get involved and you give back. These things don't take care of themselves."

They certainly don't and the Condis clearly took that advice and acted on it. And at the same time, they have taught all of us valuable lessons about dedication, service, and giving – about character, integrity, making a deal on a handshake and one's word, honoring that deal and what it means to live a good, honorable life.

Gary and Myrna live honorable lives every day and they teach us all so much through their actions and their words. I was thinking about that today – about how much I have learned from Myra and Gary and I'll bet you have too.

Their cowboy wisdom makes such good simple sense today – and underscores why we honor them today. For example – the Condie's are great listeners and invite others to participate. Cowboy wisdom says, "Think quickly, talk slowly, and remember that sometimes silence is the best answer." The Condie's listen and bring out the best in others.

The Condie's set a great example of high standards and a principled life. As the cowboy wisdom says, "Live a good honorable life – then when you are older and think back – you'll enjoy it a second time. I have no doubt, as they look back, the Condie's enjoy their lives over and over again.

The Condie's never give up. Cowboy wisdom says, "When you lose, don't lose the lessons. And, Myrna and Gary work to get better at what they do each day."

The Condie's are trail blazers – just think about all the things they have started. Cowboy wisdom says, "Every path has some pebbles. But don't worry. Most of what people worry about never happens." The Condie's don't worry. They act, and as a result, they blaze new trails.

The Condie's involve others. Cowboy wisdom says, "If you are riding ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then and make sure it's still with you." The Condie's make sure we are all in the loop.

The Condie's live by high standards and set an example. Cowboy wisdom says, "You can't unsay a cruel thing. The best sermons are lived not preached." The Condie's live the way they treat others, with the highest regard and respect.

And, the Condie's pay attention and have the courage to change course and do what's right. Cowboy wisdom says, "Just because you're following a well marked trail doesn't mean that whoever made it knew where they were going." The Condie's take the road less traveled, and as cowboy wisdom says, are practical and change course when needed. Cowboy wisdom says "No matter how far you get down the road, if it is the wrong road turn back. And, whatever you do, when your horse dies – dismount!" The Condie's desire to be successful for the rest of us and that means, they've ridden a lot of horses and taught us how to do the same.

Douglas Adams has said, "To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity." Indeed, that is the true gift that Gary and Myrna have given all of us through their many activities. In whatever they have involved themselves, they have done so with a genuine interest in helping others. Their concern was not for themselves, but for making a difference in the lives of others and benefitting Santa Clarita. They have had a profound influence on countless thousands of young people in our community. Because of their dedication and devotion, they have helped generate the resources needed for so many organizations to undertake all that they do on a daily basis to support and nurture those who need it most. The list of organizations they have supported with their time, talents, and resources is a long one, but each and every group is one that plays a critical role in creating the special fabric of our community. The Santa Clarita Valley would be a far different place without each of those organizations. And it's safe to say those organizations would not be what they are without the Condie's.

What makes Gary and Myrna's service particularly remarkable, of course, is all the adversity they have dealt with through the years. In their persistence and positive attitude, they embody the spirit of the American West. It was in the West that people saw opportunity, possibilities, and the chance to make a better way of life. A certain ruggedness and determination was mixed with a spirit of independence to create a willingness to move forward and persist until success was achieved, regardless of the obstacles and uncertainty that lay ahead.

As I reflect on the Condie's, I am reminded of one of my favorite quotes. Charles Swindoll said, "Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it." As we saw in the video, a lot has

happened to the Condie's. Who would blame them if they simply hunkered down together and limited themselves to focusing on their problems? That's our natural instinct sometimes. But as you heard Gary say, they realized they had a choice. Bitter or better. Let their problems drag them down. Or put aside bitterness and realize adversity can build you into a better person.

It's what choice the Condie's made. They are better people for it, and we are better because of the Condie's. Yes, we owe them a debt of gratitude for their selfless service to College of the Canyons and so many other community organizations. But far more valuable is the example they given us. What they have shown us through their character, their steadfast determination, and their persistence in the face of unimaginable challenges, is invaluable, and a genuine inspiration. For that I am truly thankful, and I know everyone here feels the same. John Wayne said, "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway."

Like the people of the wagon trains, and those who did the unimaginable so that we could be here today, we rally when adversity sets in – we pull together and help others when we can, we forge partnerships, make new treaties and, like the Old West was built, we figure it out together.

That's what makes our community a place we all want to be. That quality, coupled with the character of the people the college has the chance to work with in Santa Clarita humbles us and is an honor for all of us at the college.

Tonight it is a special joy to acknowledge people who always "saddle up" – to honor their spirit, their resolve, and their dedication by bestowing on them this special award. They embody the enthusiasm, the persistence, and the optimistic can-do spirit that matches our own at College of the Canyons. Please join me in honoring two special friends, Gary and Myrna Condie, with the 2010 Silver Spur Award for community service.