

Silver Spur Comments 2012 – Richard and Marian Sandnes

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Dianne Van Hook, and I am proud to serve as Chancellor of College of the Canyons in the great community of Santa Clarita. Thank you for being here with us this evening. As well, I want to extend a special thank you to our event co-chairs – Jeff Hacker and Randy Moberg. They have done an outstanding job in creating what is truly a special event, and they deserve to be recognized for their efforts.

It is a privilege to have all of you join us in honoring Richard and Marian Sandnes – two people who are very special to our community, and true friends to College of the Canyons. I always appreciate watching the videos of our honorees, and seeing their stories. As Marian did, I spent many summer days as a teenager at Orange County beaches. And just like Richard, I too spent my childhood in Minnesota. I am likewise grateful to be out of those winters!

Yet, there's something special about growing up in the Midwest. It's known as America's Heartland for a reason, as the industrious immigrants who settled there to raise crops and families have left us a rich legacy of values.

- The honor of hard work.
- The power of ingenuity.
- The importance of giving your best.
- The commitment of family.
- The joy of helping others.

These same values define Richard and Marian, and as the video so eloquently showed us, theirs is truly an American story.

Where else can a teenager parlay an after-school dishwashing job into a career as a nationwide restaurant entrepreneur? We are lucky in America to live in a land of possibilities where your effort, your ideas, and your hustle can take you as far as you are willing to go. Abraham Lincoln said, “Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other.” Richard and Marian have certainly shown that to be true.

I personally admire Richard and Marian’s determination to succeed and their commitment to family. And, I am particularly awed that they have applied that same determination and commitment to helping others in Santa Clarita.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, “What are we doing for others?” Richard and Marian are among the few who wouldn’t have to pause before answering that question. Those who know them could cite example after example of ways they have given a helping hand, taught a valuable lesson, brightened someone’s day, or shown others a future they never dreamed would be possible.

If you look closely at where they have invested themselves, you’ll notice their generosity has been dominated by a singular focus - creating opportunities for children and young adults. Ray L. Wilbur, the third president of Stanford University, said, “The potential possibilities of any child are the most intriguing and stimulating in all creation.”

Throughout their lives, Richard and Marian have devoted themselves to ensuring that children have the opportunity to explore those possibilities, whether it was owning a ceramics studio and fostering creativity through art lessons, or running a horse ranch where teen-agers learned the satisfaction that comes from building something from the ground up.

And here in Santa Clarita, through their two decades of generosity, the Sandneses have ensured that children in Santa Clarita can experience the after-school programs at the SCV Boys and Girls Club and summer workshops at the Canyon Theatre Guild, or grow from the support services offered at the Child and Family Center and the therapy and recreation at Carousel Ranch, and receive needed care at Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital.

And, closer to home at COC, our students have also been touched by the kindness of Richard and Marian, who have focused their energy on ensuring that the doors to higher education will be open for those who need help in achieving their dreams.

Six years ago, Marian and Richard established the Michael “Mike” Sandnes Memorial Scholarship in honor of their son who played football for the Cougars from 1975 to 1977. As an endowed scholarship, it will continue to benefit students in perpetuity. It has already made a profound impact in the lives of those who have received it:

- **Amber Johnson** received her BA from UC Berkeley in social welfare. She is working in physical therapy, and planning to pursue a PhD/MD in orthopedic medicine.
- **Devon Ballentine** studied Kinesiology and Nursing at COC and plans to be a Physician’s Assistant.

- **Nathan Caukin** graduated from COC with a degree in Transfer Studies, transferred to Long Beach State, and is majoring in Recreation Management.
- **Kathryn Nelson**, a Kinesiology major at COC, hopes to make a difference for children too. Her goal is to work in a Pediatric Physical Therapy occupation.

Two years ago, College of the Canyons was presented with a unique opportunity to create new scholarships for students. The Bernard Osher Foundation pledged to match every \$2 we raised for new scholarships with \$1. The Sandneses realized the potential impact of that opportunity and quickly agreed to create another endowed scholarship in addition to the one they had already funded.

Together, the two scholarship funds totaled \$150,000, which was matched by \$75,000 from the Osher Foundation for a total of \$225,000, which will create eleven \$1,000 scholarships to be offered to students every year for the rest of time. Imagine the impact of that investment in the development of the human potential and in opening the doors of opportunity for many for whom those doors would never have been able to be opened.

Their passion for College of the Canyons stems from their personal experiences with the college. Along with their son Mike, their granddaughter Christina was a student here too. Like many of our local high school students, she wasn't quite sure where she wanted to go after graduation. She was considering Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, but Richard and Marian asked me to meet with her and tell her more about COC and the advantages we offer. Meeting with students is a highlight for me, so I was glad to do so. Once she had a chance to learn more about the college, and do some exploring on her own, Christina opted to become a Cougar. She made College of the Canyons her home and played on our women's water polo team. And after two years, she was off to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. She has since graduated and is now working here in town.

Christopher Reeve said, “So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.” At a time when strong role models of people who care, people who are committed, people of conviction and tenacity, are rare and hard to find, and when we opt for technology instead of human conversation, it is extremely motivating and inspirational to know people such as the Sandneses.

The more I have gotten to know them and see them in action, the more I am inspired by their style, what they stand for, and how they treat others. They are old-fashioned, they pick up the phone, they spend time personally with others, they look you in the eye, they own the conversation and relationships and they are true to their word. In this era of technology where so many messages are one way, where folks do not check for understanding, and where people are concerned about the results only, not who is affected in the process, the Sandneses are wonderful examples of how to make things better, in a selfless way, by doing it with character, with adherence to what they stand for, and with regard to the impact over the long haul.

Through their purposeful actions, Richard and Marian have taught all of us valuable lessons about dedication, service, and giving – about character, integrity, and what it means to live a good, honorable life – all the ideals that are embodied in the Silver Spur Award, which we have awarded for the past 22 years. 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 Richard and Marian 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, and will continue to do so in the years to come.

That is particularly true at the Institute of Culinary Arts at College of the Canyons. This is one of the fastest growing programs at our college, equipping students with the skills needed to succeed in a dynamic and exciting career field. We wanted to be sure our future chefs and restaurant managers were learning what they needed to in order to thrive in their new fields. So we asked the Sandneses to review the curriculum and provide us with their insights. They did so willingly, giving us a perspective that has been honed by more than five decades in the business. That expertise is invaluable, and they shared it without hesitation, eager to pass on what they've learned to a new generation of emerging industry leaders. And as we began drawing plans for a new on-campus facility to house the Culinary Program, we again turned to Richard and Marian for their take on what features the building should include. Of course, they happily provided us with their thoughts, and the final product will be so much the better for that input.

Clearly, the Sandneses' dedication and generosity has impacted lives in ways we will never know. Their influence reminds me of a quote by Jackson Brown, who said, "Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you."

Richard and Marian have continually demonstrated their belief in mankind and the belief that the more you help people and take an interest in the things that impact the future, the more mankind is enriched.

People involve themselves in the work of non-profit organizations for a wide variety of reasons. Richard and Marian's involvement stems from the heart. As former *Saturday Evening Post* editor George H. Lorimer said, "Back of every life there are principles that have fashioned it." The Sandneses give back to the college because they are members of the community and see it as their privileged duty to make our community a better place. Indeed, they give because it is their nature. Richard and Marian give back because they truly believe that education improves lives and in turn improves the future.

They deserve a heartfelt thank you, and that is why we are here this evening; to thank two of the dearest friends the College could ever hope for, and to publicly acknowledge our debt of gratitude. We can never repay Richard and Marian what we owe them. But we can follow their example, and honor what they have given to us, by striving to provide our own detailed answers to that question posed by Martin Luther King – “What are we doing for others?”

Given that they have done so much for so many of us, please join me in honoring our 2012 Silver Spur Awardees for Community Service, Richard and Marian Sandnes.