Charles C. Cochrane, Jr.'s reputation for being a friend of higher education preceded him when he became the publisher and CEO of the Yakima Herald-Republic in 1996. He also had a strong reputation for being involved with the community.

He carried both of those commitments with him to Yakima, and his leadership is a wonderful role model for Yakima Valley Community College graduates.

His community service over the years has touched youth baseball, leadership councils, newspaper organizations, chamber of commerce, a symphony, the arts community, law enforcement, YMCA, civic and service clubs, Salvation Army and higher education boards.

Before coming to Yakima, he was the publisher for the Walla Walla Union Bulletin and, before that, senior vice president of the Seattle Times Company. He continues serving on the board of directors of the Seattle Times Company as well as the Walla Walla Union Bulletin and the Yakima Herald-Republic.

He is active in the Yakima Rotary, the United Way Board, the Yakima Downtown Redevelopment Committee, the Greater Yakima Chamber of Commerce Board, the Yakima County Development Association Board, Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees, and with the Washington State University Foundation Board Ambassadors.

Mr. Cochrane is married and has two children.

Elaine A. Ostrander, molecular biologist and clinical researcher at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, is the recipient of the Yakima Valley Community College Alumni Association Distinguished Alumnus Award for 1997. The Award will be conferred during YVCC's 68th Commencement on June 12 at 7 p.m. in Parker Field. Her parents are Connie and Richard Ostrander of Yakima, and she graduated from YVCC in 1978.

Ostrander's genetic investigation includes the role of genes in cancer, especially breast and prostate cancer. A new project, the study of breast cancer in China, has her involved with a very large group of women from Shanghai to determine the frequency of inherited breast cancer in Asian women.

"Recently, my lab, together with colleagues at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, discovered that about 10 percent of women who have breast cancer before the age of 35 have mutations in an important gene called the BRCA1 gene. Mutations in this gene lead to almost certain breast cancer, and women with these mutations have a 50 percent chance of passing them to their daughters," said Ostrander. This discovery was summarized as a 1996 lead article in the New England Journal of Medicine. It also forms the basis of public health policy regarding diagnostic testing for inherited breast cancer in young women in the United States.

"My lab is also interested in similar genes that predispose men to inherited prostate cancer. I believe my lab's most significant accomplishment has been in integrating the
disciplines of basic science, epidemiology, and clinical medicine to ask critical questions about the role of genetics in cancer."

The degrees she has earned include a bachelor of science from the University of Washington, a Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology from the Oregon Health Sciences University, and a postdoctoral fellowship to Harvard University to conduct research for three years. She then advanced to the role of staff scientist and group leader of the Genetic Mapping Group at the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab. She is a 1976 graduate of Eisenhower High School.

Three years ago she joined the Fred Hutchinson Center where she holds joint faculty appointments in molecular medicine and clinical research. She is also an affiliate assistant professor for the University of Washington departments of zoology and molecular biotechnology.

Ostrander has published over 30 peer-reviewed articles, many in journals such as Science and Nature. She has lectured extensively to local community interest groups, high schools, universities, and other groups throughout the nation. Her work has also taken her abroad to Portugal, Japan and China.

The rich diversity of Yakima Valley Community College's student body will be reflected in a unique speech for two voices and two languages when Lori Conley and Albert Gutierrez represent the graduating class during Commencement.

Lori, a 1990 graduate of Prosser High School, first came to YVCC’s Grandview Campus in the fall of 1995 to participate in the Women’s Program. "I was very scared, but I felt I had no other choice," said Lori, who is a single mother of two daughters. "This turned out to be one of the smartest moves I ever made. The Women’s Program provided me with the tools I needed to go forward. Then the Grandview faculty and staff helped create for me a special environment in which to learn."

After her first YVCC class in psychology, Lori became so interested in that field that she proceeded to take every psychology class the college offered. She plans to continue her studies in psychology at Washington State University. "I'm so happy to know," she says, "that I am a lot better at doing psychology and sociology than laundry and dishes."

Lori will speak about the life changing experience her education at YVCC has been while at the same time providing listeners with a glimpse of the lessons she learned in the vineyard with her grandfather. One of those lessons, she says, is that however cold and grey things may seem at times, "Spring always arrives." For her, that Spring was YVCC.

Albert Gutierrez, whose comments will intertwine with Lori’s, will present a portion of his speech in Spanish. "The language of our parents and grandparents is part of our heritage," he said. "We want to let our families know, in Spanish, that deep down we're all appreciative of their support."

When he was younger, Albert spent many cold and wet hours working with his family in fields and orchards picking apples, cherries, strawberries, blueberries and raspberries. He decided then that he was capable of more. Like Lori, Albert felt very nervous about coming to college but is glad he made that choice. The experience, he says, has helped him develop into a stronger, more mature, and better educated individual.

"YVCC in Grandview doesn't seem very big," he says, "but it still has very much to offer."

Albert graduated from Prosser High School in 1993 and is an instructional assistant for a kindergarten class at McClure Elementary School in Grandview. He plans to attend Heritage College and is interested in a career in computer science, counseling, or teaching. He enjoys being around children and hopes he can be a positive influence on them. "If I touch them with my words," he said, "perhaps I can aim them towards a better way of life."