

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Choosing one job over another could have been a difficult decision for *Clara R. Jimenez*, YVCC's 2002 Distinguished Alumnus, so when recently offered two very different career opportunities, she decided to accept them both. In January, Ms. Jimenez was the first Hispanic woman to be elected Mayor of the City of Toppenish, Washington. And in July, she will leave her current position as Assistant Principal of Toppenish High School to take on new responsibilities as Principal of West Elementary School in Toppenish.

A lifetime resident of Toppenish, Ms. Jimenez is the first of nine children born to a migrant farm worker family. She remembers long, hot days working in the fields as early as age six. Fortunately for her, her family settled long enough in the valley for her to graduate from Toppenish High School in 1978. She worked as a secretary in a law firm and in a school



for many years but knew she wanted to pursue a career as an educator. Ms. Jimenez decided to begin her college education at YVCC, which was no small task as a single mother of two small boys. She looks back on those days as some of the most challenging of her life but says that earning her associate's degree at YVCC in 1989 gave her the foundation she needed to achieve future academic goals.

"Had I not succeeded at YVCC, I don't think I would have continued in school," she recalls. "I had the determination, but there were just so many obstacles in my way at the time." She credits YVCC faculty, especially Dr. Bernal Baca of the Office of Multicultural Recruitment and Retention, for taking the time to encourage and guide her.

Following YVCC, Ms. Jimenez graduated *summa cum laude* from Heritage College in 1991 with a Bachelor of Arts in Education. She graduated from the Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, receiving a Master in Public Administration in 1995, and in 1997 Ms. Jimenez obtained a Master of Education in Educational Administration from Heritage College. She has received numerous awards and honors for academic achievements and for dedication to community service.

"My advice to students," says Jimenez, "is to never give up; you'll get there. And remember, education is the key," she added.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI OF PREVIOUS YEARS

Catherine May Bedell
1982

J. Alex (Lex) Maxwell
1983

Sid Morrison
1984

James R. Sorenson
1985

Robert Brachtenbach
1986

E. Frederick Velikanje
1987

Bill Barnett
1988

Bill Lee
1989

Gene Shields
1990

Mel Lewis
1991

Denny Hitchcock
1992

Dete Rademacher
1993

David Shim
1994

Mike Bernazzani
1995

Erasmus Gamboa
1996

Elaine Ostrander
1997

Tom J. Chambers
1998

Richard E. Weller
1999

Mel Stottlemyre
2000

Christopher Wiehl
2001