Saddleback College Veterans Memorial Honored by Freedoms Foundation

Mission Viejo, CA – Saddleback College was thrilled to accept the 2011 George Washington Honor Medal from the Orange County Chapter of the Freedoms Foundation on Saturday, February 11th at Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club. The award was bestowed specifically for the Saddleback College Veterans Memorial, the most significant tribute to veterans at any community college campus in the nation, and is representative of the Freedoms Foundation’s values: educating our youth, promoting the ideals and principles of a free society, recognizing outstanding civic achievements, cultivating excellence in education, and inspiring tomorrow’s leaders.

The event was attended by several local elected officials, including Assemblyman Don Wagner, Assemblywoman Diane Harkey, South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees President Nancy Padberg and Trustee Frank Meldau, Ph.D., Mission Viejo City Council Member Trish Kelley, and Laguna Niguel City Council Member Gary Capata. Also in attendance were the memorial artists, Professor Richard White and Fred Olsen, and Dr. Diana McCullough, wife of Dr. Richard D. McCullough, former president of Saddleback College and the person credited with first envisioning the creation of the memorial.

Upon accepting the award for the college, Dr. Tod A. Burnett, president of Saddleback College, stated, “Our veterans memorial was a collaborative effort, with scores of students, faculty, staff, and community members dedicating a great deal of their time and resources to making this memorial a reality. It is the talent and workmanship of the artists, Professor Richard White and Fred Olsen, the vision of Dr. Richard McCullough, and the dedication of many, many others that made the Saddleback College Veterans Memorial a reality.”
Joyce Van Schaack, a member of the Freedoms Foundation Orange County Chapter and of the Saddleback College Foundation Board of Governors, stated, “The George Washington Honor Medal is given to those who draw public attention to America’s rich heritage and unique freedoms. Saddleback College has not only set up programs specifically for our veterans, but they have actually built a veterans memorial to honor all veterans, and they are the only community college in the country to have done so.”

The concept for building the memorial began on Veterans Day 2004, when Dr. McCullough, then Saddleback College’s president, called a committee made up of veterans, college employees, and community members to discuss ways to permanently pay homage to veterans. It is this group that envisioned an on-campus memorial that would rightly demonstrate the college’s gratitude for America’s service men and women. The college has seen a growing number of service members attending the institution and currently serves more than 1,000 student veterans and active duty military personnel each year.

To honor Dr. McCullough’s role in the development of the memorial, Dr. Burnett called a moment of silence in memory of the former college president, whose loss is mourned by his friends and colleagues at Saddleback College after he passed away on January 31st.

The Freedoms Foundation was established in 1949 as a not-for-profit educational organization by Ken Wells, Don Belding, and E.F. Hutton. President Dwight D. Eisenhower served as its first chairman and chairman emeritus until his death in 1969. The Freedoms Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization and is supported primarily by voluntary contributions from individuals, corporations, foundations, service organizations, endowment funds, and its volunteer chapters.

Located in Mission Viejo, Saddleback College provides quality higher education and training to the greater south Orange County community. Having served more than 500,000 students since 1968, Saddleback College offers more than 300 degree and certificate programs to help students reach their personal, career, and educational goals. For more information, please visit www.saddleback.edu.

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