

Diversity Awards Honor Commitment to Inclusion, Community Enrichment



Erika Johnson

She calls herself an “everyday mom,” but her cause goes far beyond her own children: Lakeysha Sowunmi has made it her mission to promote healthy lifestyle changes for all San Diego families. She is currently the African American Campaign Coordinator for the Network for a Healthy California at UC San Diego, where she dedicates her time to helping to reform children’s eating habits and providing nutritional resources for low-income families.

Sowunmi was among 19 UC San Diego individuals and departments honored Feb. 13 for their service to the community at the annual Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action and Diversity Awards ceremony in the Price Center Ballroom.

“It is important to recognize our staff, faculty and students for their contributions to diversity and their efforts to improve our community,” Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla said. “Diversity is more than just a goal. It’s something we need to think about every day, and something that we need to strive for in everything we do.”

The awardees were recognized for their unique contributions and tireless efforts to promote awareness, wellness and understanding—including outreach to underserved communities, campus workshops aimed to foster open dialogues and mentorship programs designed to build a supportive campus environment.

As part of her work at UC San Diego, Sowunmi organizes a program called Body & Soul to connect faith-based communities on a tight budget to low-cost physical education classes, consultations with dietitians and key nutritional advice on how to prevent chronic disease.

Her campaign to eat right and exercise daily also extends to her own children’s school, where she seeks to empower other parents by example. Sowunmi was one of the first women to be named a California “Champion Mom”—a title earned from the Network for a Healthy California—that has

enabled her to initiate healthy changes at the school such as cutting down on sugary beverages and vending machine usage, contesting the elimination of physical education classes and educating parents at PTA meetings.

“As a mother of three, it can be a battle to get my kids to eat right,” said Sowunmi. “I share my story to empower other parents to adopt healthy eating practices. I strive to help them realize that healthy changes start one small step at a time.”

“Our success as a university depends upon our ability to identify and utilize our different experiences to enhance the common good,” said Linda S. Greene, UC San Diego vice chancellor of equity, diversity and inclusion. “One of our highest priorities is the provision of learning opportunities to those who have not had access to high quality education resources.

For the past decade, Bruce Arnold, director of Mathematics Testing and Placement and another Diversity Awards honoree, has reached out to low-income K-12 students through numerous programs designed to encourage an interest in math and science.

“My goal is to bring students to campus and position UC San Diego as a partner in community education,” said Arnold. “I’d like our campus to be welcoming and help students realize that they are college material, whether they choose to enroll here or at another university.”



Bruce Arnold, center

Arnold has coordinated the invitation and transportation of thousands of high school students—as far south as Tijuana and north to Los Angeles—to attend the Kyoto Prize Symposium held annually at UC San Diego. By organizing buses to the event, Arnold offers students a chance to visit the university and interact with some of the world’s top researchers and scientists and learn how they got their start in science and math.

In 2003, Arnold introduced the San Diego Math Circle to campus, an organization that has grown to become one of the largest math circles in the nation with more than 400 elementary, middle and high school members. Every Saturday morning, students gather at UC San Diego to participate in activities designed to make math fun and applicable to daily life. In an effort to provide more access to underserved areas, Arnold recently proposed the establishment of a secondary branch of the program in City Heights.

“I am humbled by this award,” said Arnold. “But seeing the students excited about what they are doing is the true reward.”

2012 Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action and Diversity Awardees

Vice Chancellor Recipients:

- R. Bruce Arnold – Academic Affairs
- Hire Online Team – External and Business Affairs
- Jill Dumbauld Nery, MPH – Health Sciences
- Leslee Matsushige and Fernando Nosratpour – Marine Sciences
- Joseph R. Romero – Resource Management & Planning
- Ann Klein – Student Affairs
- Aaron J. Byzak – UC San Diego Health System

University-wide Recipients:

- Luis Alvarez, Ph.D.
- Nadine A. George, Ph.D.
- Davyda T. Johnson
- Margie Mathewson and Laura Connelly
- Frieder Seible, Ph.D.
- Robina Shaheen, Ph.D.
- Lakeysha L. Sowunmi

Department/Unit Recipients:

- Housing Administrative and Triton Card Account Services
- The Village Office of Residential Life
- UC San Diego Extension K-16 Programs

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