

MARGIE RUBIO - Sept. 2016

Student Support Specialist Margie Rubio Came Up the Hill and Set an Example for All



It is most fitting that Margie Rubio was chosen for a position that includes overseeing Merritt's Welcome Center, a place where students can feel comfortable asking for the help they need to succeed in their educational goals.

It was 17 years ago when Margie herself came to Merritt to change her life. Raised in a low-income, single-parent home in Oakland, she attended Fremont High School and soon was swept into a drug-selling lifestyle. But in 1995, two years after she had graduated, and because of the influence of her sister who had gone to Merritt, she found herself heading up the hill to make a change. "I came up and brought one of my friends from my 'hood and said, 'let's make something of ourselves before we go to jail or get killed,'" says Margie. "But when we got there, we didn't have a good experience, and we didn't feel like we would fit in." So they went back down.

It wasn't until 2009, when Margie became pregnant, that she knew she had to give it another chance. "I didn't want to raise my son under those conditions, I didn't feel like I was educated enough to raise a child," she says. "I prayed and said no matter what opposition comes my way I have to stay this time."

And this time she did. The first person she met was (retired Dean) Horace Graham. "Dean Graham not only assisted me with registration and financial aid, but he offered me a job in Student Services as a work study student. All through the process I got moral support, I couldn't believe it. My past kept saying, 'you're not worth it, you're not going to make it.' After the first semester, I was able to take a breath and say, "Let me see if I can do another one."

Margie never forgot those who led her in the right direction, from Dean Graham and the Learning Center staff to Claire Crosetti, Stefani De Vito, Allyson Hunter, Rose Allen, Margaret Dixon, and many others. She graduated from Merritt with an A.A. in Administration of Justice and went on to earn her B.A. from Cal State East Bay in Criminal Justice. Now she's aiming for a master's degree in Educational Leadership.

While she is not proud of her past, she sees her new role as a way to be an example of how to turn your life around. She wants to help the students who might be in the same position—and she is now in the perfect position to do it. "I work here with such gratitude," says Margie. "I owe it to the Merritt community for finding my way. Now I am able to really help someone who is coming up the hill that has the same doubts I had. I can say, 'I went through the same process, and if I can make it, you can.'"

As Student Support Specialist, Margie is excited to be among the first faces new students see when they come to Merritt and the last as they graduate at the Commencement ceremonies she helps to organize. She sees it as part of her job to keep them there from start to finish. "I'm glad to be able to provide the

steps to success to make sure they follow through. I have an open door policy to welcome them and give them the motivation and encouragement to get them through. I genuinely love what I do.”

But what Margie is most proud of is the example she sets for her son, 8. “Jabez was born and raised at Merritt, and he really wants to go to college, even if he just wants to play basketball for now,” she says with a smile. “I feel especially proud when I overhear him bragging to his friends, “My mom works at Merritt College.”

—*Susan May*