Council bestows Huynh Awards

By Anne Terzi-Bellamy

The annual presentation of the Thong Ly Huynh Awards, as Davis Mayor Brett Lee said on Tuesday evening, is "a very sobering recognition."

While the awards celebrate the work and contributions of community members whose actions exemplify the goals of diversity, community, social justice and equal rights, they also serve as a reminder of why that work is needed.

Huynh, after all, was a Davis High School student who was stabbed to death on campus in May 1999 in what was a racially motivated attack.

In his memory, the city annually bestows awards in categories including civil rights advocacy, community involvement, lifetime achievement and public servant of the year. And Tuesday’s award ceremony was likely to poignantly mark any Huynh award ceremony has been since the awards inception.

In presenting an award for community involvement, Councilman Will Arnold noted that Huynh “was murdered just outside my mom’s classroom. She saw it go down.”

A beloved longtime teacher in Davis, Martha Cannon Arnold died just weeks ago at the age of 76.

“Tina was an effort that was near and dear to her heart,” an emotional Arnold said.

See AWARDS, Page A3.
AWARDS: Council honors folks who make Davis a better place

From Page 41

On Tuesday, it was her son receiving an award on the Founding members of Community Harvest of Davis — Joe and Linda Schwartz and Greg and Pam Gibas. Over the last decade, Arnold said, Community Harvest volunteers have harvested and donated almost 300,000 pounds of fresh, local fruit to those in need across Davis and throughout Yolo County. Also receiving an award in the same category this year was the UC Davis Activities and Recreation Center.

In presenting the award, Mayor Pro Tem Gloria Partida noted the AHC "represents the best of Davis — a place where persons of all backgrounds, all beliefs, all abilities, and all interests are welcomed and met with activities suitable to their individual and collective preferences, in a place without judgment.

Nancy均衡, meanwhile, was presented with the Lifetime achievement award Tuesday night.

As founder of the Culture C.O.F., Holman assuages people and organizations working with equity and diversity in education, business and the community.

Looking out at the standing, mostly moved in the community chambers, Holman spoke of her and of the late Davis Police Officer Natalie Corona — who later in the evening would receive the public servant award — and of all the young people "who never get a chance to get a lifetime achievement award because they were taken too soon.

"So I want to encourage all of you to come out of retirement, figure out what your gift is, don't waste time and use it to make a difference," said Holman.

Davis High teacher Kelly Willerson, who received the civil rights advocacy award Tuesday evening, had a similar message.

Willerson was recognized for founding and leading the local Unitarian Universalist chapter, which works to elect candidates who believe in diversity and equal rights across the country, and for her personal efforts on behalf of vulnerable communities.

In accepting the award, she said, "We are in a present where there is racism, xenophobia, misogyny, immigration issues...and it's so important, as Sandy said, for us to go out and do the work and not stay silent in the middle of that. So it's really with great humility that I accept this award because I know that I have not done enough to fight against the attacks on our civil rights...but I'm going to look at this as a challenge...to earn the award in the days and years to come.

The final award of the night was that of public servant of the year, accepted on behalf of Corona by her parents, Looke and Marilyn, and her three younger sisters.

Corona, said the mayor, "often went out of her way to help others, from buying necessities for a family displaced by the Camp Fire to personally getting to know the homeless community on her beat and giving them money to buy a meal. "Natalie's legacy is strong in that it has continued to inspire young women and men, some from her hometown and some who are first generation college students, to apply for the community service officer program in an effort to follow in her footsteps," said Lee.

"Officer Corona possessed everything that the Thang Hy Hung award stands for."

Meredith Corona said the family accepted the award on behalf of not only Natalie, but also on behalf of all of the officers in the Davis Police Department.

"They are our new family," she said, "they have taken us in and accepted us in their new family and we are just truly honored.

"My daughter was a very humble person, as we are, as we just were truly honored to be here to receive this award."

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