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Community College lauds 'Artists of Promise'

Tom Scanlon Tribune Managing Editor : 3-4 minutes

Community colleges often are known best for training students in trades: automotive, information technology, nursing, welding, and the like.

But the Maricopa County Community College District also has many arts programs. And Mesa Community College, part of that district, is home to several "Artists of Promise."

Several MCC students living in Mesa were recently recognized for their talent in a district-wide contest.

Valerie Neal is a creative writer with far-ranging vision.

Jacqueline Gentry is a provocative poet.

Ashley Tenney tells stories via the flute.

Helena Balderrama Saucedo has an eye for fashion.

Tenney won first place in the instrumental category for "Chaminade Concertino in D major."

A Desert Ridge High School graduate, Tenny studied Music Education at MCC and is transferring to ASU.

"I have loved preparing this piece, and I'm so grateful for what music does for me in my life," she said. "I hope I can share the joy it has brought me with others.

"I think music is an important part of humanity, connecting us across generations, countries, and time and letting us experience eras and places we cannot physically go. As one of my favorite artists said, 'life is short, art is forever.'

"I want to take every opportunity to leave even just a tiny fingerprint on our world's mural."

In the fiction category, Neal scored first place for her short story "Jivan Yatra." She qualifies for the national League of Innovation community college competition.

Neal graduated from Mesa High in 1976 and attended MCC during her senior year.

"At that time I was focused in a medical line and didn't have time for the arts. I returned to MCC later in life to study creative writing," she said.

She described her story as "a mix of fact and fiction inspired by my travels in India."

In the fashion category, a second-place award went to Saucedo for "Flower."

She came here after going to high school in Mexico. After graduating from MCC, she has big plans: "I would like to work with Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro Iñárritu and the other Mexicans who won Oscars."

Gentry took second place for her poem "Corruption."

She attended Red Mountain High School before studying creative writing at MCC.

"I'm still working towards a seemingly arbitrary goal of 'Author' or 'Writer' and receiving such a placement in the Artist of Promise Competition is both motivating and reassuring that my goals aren't so far out of reach," she said.

Her winning poem has a dark edge, below its sugary surface:

"Honey is so sweet.

Tangy and tacky and smooth and saccharine—

