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ORANGE COUNTY CONSERVATION CORPS CELEBRATES A RECORD NUMBER OF GRADUATES

Anaheim, CA – June 28, 2010—Succeeding against the odds is never easy, but a record number of graduates proved what they are capable of by earning their high school diploma from the Orange County Conservation Corps.

Assemblyman Jose Solorio was the keynote speaker at the June 25 ceremony, during which 55 students received recognition for completing a program which often requires 12-13 hours of work and study per day.

"The Corps gave me the opportunity and desire to have a better future for myself," said graduate Jannette Delgado, 19, of Santa Ana. "I had many distractions and I didn't care for school, I wasn't motivated. What the Corps has given me ... I started to care about doing better for myself."

Delgado's immediate plans are to attend a local junior college, move on to a four-year college and then pursue a career in psychology.

"This is the biggest day for the OCCC all year," said Jarom M. Luedtke, the OCCC's Director of Education. "It is a day to celebrate OCCC's best and brightest. It is the tangible evidence that the OCCC not only changes lives, but does so in an extraordinary way. The vast majority of these students were told that they would probably never receive a high school diploma.

"This event silences the critics and cynics who give up on OC young adults. It infuses into every 18- to 25-year-old that a high school diploma is still possible. It demonstrates that there is a better choice. The OCCC is certainly one of the ways - if not the best way-for OC young adults to become the best that they can be."

Corps members, many who will go on to college, volunteered their time for such events as Toys for Tots, Renegade Races, Green Job Corps workshops and graffiti removal through Senator Lou Correa's office, all while attending school.

"The young men and women graduating today have overcome tremendous adversity just to get here," said OCCC Executive Director Max Carter. "So many must overcome poverty, avoid gangs, stay free of drug abuse, and avert incarceration in an effort to ensure a positive life for themselves and their children. These Corps members will now go on as working, productive members of their community."

Corps members must earn 200 credits and pass the California High School Exit Exam to graduate, and they understand the importance of a diploma and how it will help them get better jobs, earn more money and increase their self esteem.

About Orange County Conservation Corps: OCCC is a nonprofit organization founded in 1993 as part of the Anaheim anti-gang task force and is affiliated with the Corps Network, California Association of Local Conservation Corps and other youth service organizations. The OCCC is a voluntary work/learn program that provides an opportunity for at risk and disadvantaged youths, age 18 to 25, to earn a living while learning valuable employment skills through job training and attending the on-site charter school to earn their high school diploma. Work projects are environmentally based and benefit the community. Funding is provided through the California Department of Conservation CalRecycle as well as individual and corporate contributions, grants, contracts and entrepreneurial projects. For more information visit their website at www.HireYouth.org.

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