Palo Alto prez feels at home

New leader Flores at the college 13 years

BY MARISSA VILLA

Ruben Michael “Mike” Flores, Palo Alto College’s newly appointed president, sees the role of community colleges as the key to the country’s future.

Flores, who was named president in September, has been working in community colleges for 19 years.

“Our success (in the community) really rides on (students’) success,” Flores says, adding that for many, community college is their first experience with higher education.

Flores has spent his first month at the college getting feedback from students, faculty and staff about what they’d like to see at the college, but it hasn’t taken long for him to feel at home. No time at all, actually.

Flores, who replaces Ana “Cha” Guzman as president, has worked at Palo Alto College for 13 years, holding every vice presidential position at the college.

But Flores’ experience with community colleges goes beyond that. The son of Ruben Flores, a retired dean at San Antonio College, Flores grew up knowing he’d one day be in leadership.

“There was always a sense of wanting to be in public service,” he says. When Flores began working in higher education, he dreamed of one day being a college president.

“I never imagined it would be here at Palo Alto,” Flores says. “I love the institution, the faculty and staff, the students. We are, in many ways, a family.”

Flores adds that he wants to keep that family-type atmosphere because it could be the key to student success.

“In higher education, it’s paramount for students to feel connected and engaged. So that’s really the main tenet of the beginning of my tenure — for us to really focus on community building and engagement,” Flores says.

He says the South Side, where the college is located and where he lives, is especially ideal for growth because of its high rate of home ownership, the high business rate and sense of entrepreneurship.

“South San Antonians are known for working hard to achieve their dreams,” Flores says. “That’s why it’s perfect to have a community college here.”

As Flores begins his second month as president of Palo Alto, he says he’ll continue listening to feedback, while doing what he believes in most — learning.

“I continue to learn every day. That’s the beauty of higher education... you continue to learn every day from students and faculty,” he says.

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