



Stockton Veterans Day Services Include Tribute To Jose ‘Nick’ Santana; Pentagon Speaker Memorial to Local Crash Victim Part of Nov. 11 Ceremonies

For Immediate Release; with link to captions and [photos](#)

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Galloway, NJ – The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey honored fallen heroes and all who served their country in a series of Veterans Day events today.

Stockton employee Jose “Nick” Santana, a veteran who was killed when his motorcycle was run off the road in August, was honored with the laying of a wreath and the unveiling of a memorial to him which will be displayed on campus. Santana’s wife, Linda, and family were present for the ceremony, along with the Somers Point Post 352 Legion Riders motorcycle group, with whom Santana rode.

Michael Merlino, vice president of the Legion Riders, noted that veterans are treated with respect at Stockton today, in contrast to the reception returning Vietnam vets received at colleges 45 years ago. He said retired Vietnam vets “made it their promise not to let future vets go through what they went through – and Nick was a part of that.”

He said Santana went on “honor missions,” welcoming home returning vets or escorting their bodies home for burial. “Nick Santana made a difference,” he said, encouraging the audience to make a difference with their lives.

President Herman Saatkamp noted in opening remarks that Stockton was honored to

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be named as “Best for Vets: Colleges 2014” by the Military Times today. “We are known nationally as one of the best schools for veterans,” he said.

Lt. Col. Randall Smith, Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Pentagon and deputy director of the Warrior and Family Support program, said, “quite honestly, it’s not that easy” to return to society after having been used to the military life.”

He said higher education plays a key role in preparing veterans for their futures as civilians, adding, “I appreciate the notable effort that Stockton has made on behalf of veterans.”

Stockton’s Veteran Affairs program, founded in 2008, now serves 400 veterans and service members. Thomas O’Donnell, assistant dean of Students/Veteran Affairs, was recognized by President Saatkamp for his work with the program, although he could not attend due to the death of his father, a decorated veteran who will be buried with military honors in Florida. Dean of Students Pedro Santana stepped in to officiate at the services.

Wendy Lang, director of Operation College Promise, the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU), said higher education has become more “innovative and collaborative” in helping veterans adjust. She said a college campus “can be a haven for bridging the civilian divide” for returning vets.

Veterans returning to school are “highly disciplined, motivated and task-oriented,” Lang noted, and are graduating as fast or faster than the student population in general. She said one million more vets are expected to return to civilian life in the next five years as the U.S. presence in Afghanistan winds down.

Matthew Generally, a 2011 Stockton graduate and veteran of the Iraq war, urged members of the Student Veterans Organization to keep the group’s momentum going. He also told veterans to ask for services, such as mental health services or getting an education.

Steve Gilroy, an alumni and former president of the SVO, said it was hard to find a job after graduation, but that it’s important to step outside one’s personal concerns to make the world better.

“Running away from problems when things are worst is not something veterans do,” Gilroy said. “This is our time.”

Ryan Pearson, a member of the SVO and Army veteran said, “At previous schools I’ve been to, it wasn’t as easy to step up and say, ‘I’m a veteran and a student.’ I can’t thank Stockton enough for the embracing feeling they’ve given us.”

The ceremonies also included a performance by the U.S. Army Band.

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