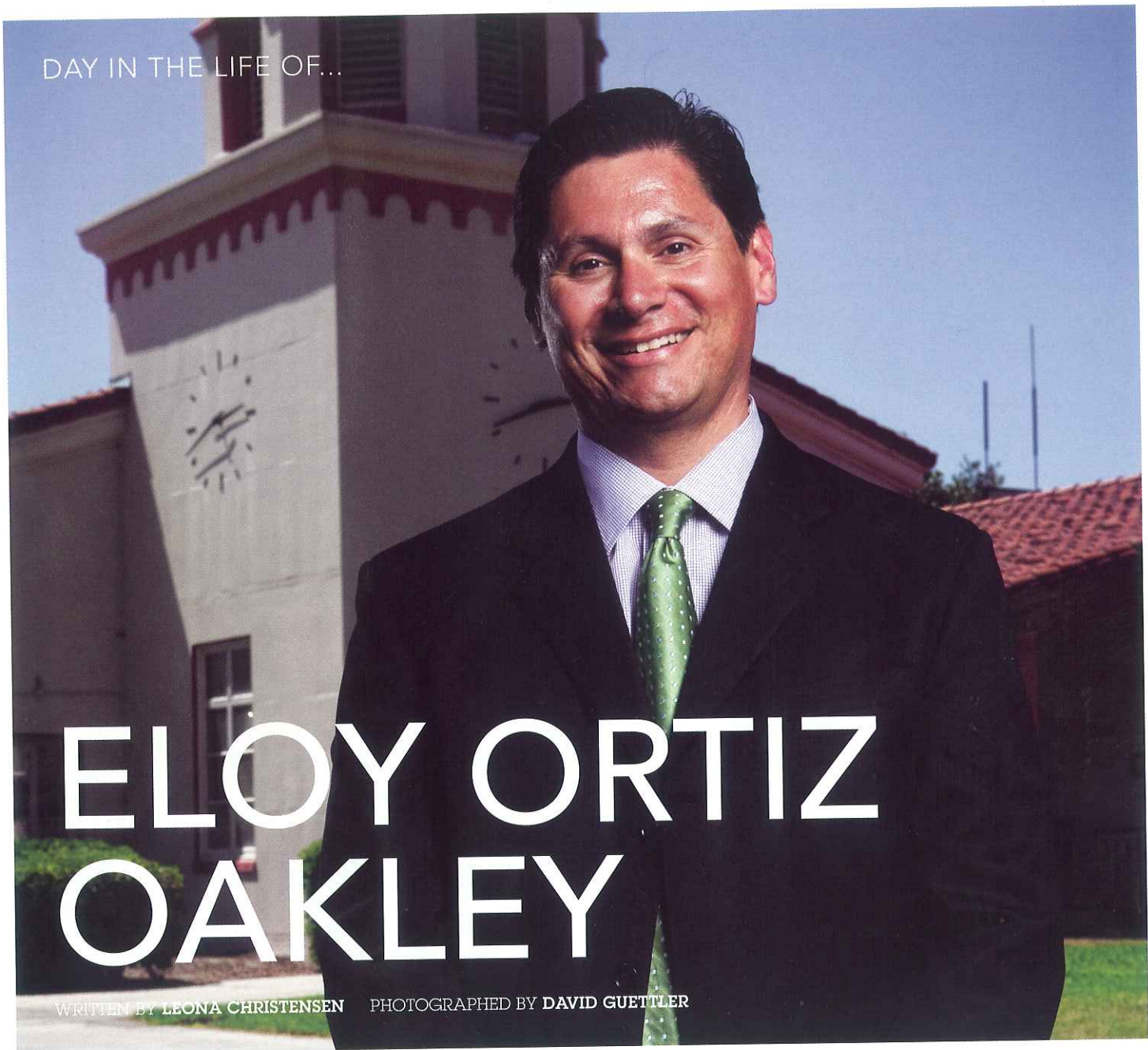


DAY IN THE LIFE OF...



ELOY ORTIZ OAKLEY

WRITTEN BY LEONA CHRISTENSEN PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID GUETTLER

Eloy Ortiz Oakley remembers what it was like to be intimidated by college and at the same time hoping for a better way of life outside of his South Los Angeles neighborhood, but not having the road map to get there.

Now, as President of Long Beach City College, Oakley sees himself in the students, particularly those who come from the South Gate and Huntington Park neighborhoods where he grew up. Like Oakley, these students come to LBCC to escape negative influences and role models.

"I definitely see myself in them, sort of running away from the situation they grew up in," says Oakley. "They are looking for something

better. They are good kids who just need an opportunity. All I needed was an opportunity and someone to give me a road map. That's what I hope to do for the folks (at LBCC)."

After graduating from a Catholic high school in Downey, Oakley was without direction. He turned down several university football scholarships and instead joined the military.

"No one in my family knew how to navigate college because no one in my family had sought higher education," says Oakley. "I was intimidated. I didn't know how I was going to manage it so I just didn't go, which typically happens to a lot of kids."

During a four-year stint in the U.S. Army, Oakley married his wife Bernadette, who he had known in high school. The couple soon had the first of their four children. After being discharged from the military, Oakley worked odd jobs. It wasn't long until he realized that he needed an education to provide a better life for his family.

"Although I was still intimidated by college, I enrolled at Golden West," says Oakley.

At Golden West College, Oakley was both a student and an employee. He continued working there while he pursued his bachelor's degree in environmental analysis and design at University of California, Irvine. He also earned his master's degree in business administration from UCI.

"It was because of Golden West that I got into UC Irvine," says Oakley. "My wife pushed me the whole way, making sure that I got my work done. She had been to college and knew how to navigate the system. She is the reason I am where I am today."

The lessons he learned juggling full-time employment while attending school, along with growing up in South Los Angeles shapes the way Oakley presides over LBCC.

"I try to hire people who can connect with the experiences of our students, either directly or can understand them," says Oakley, "not someone who is completely withdrawn from the realities of the students we serve. All of our students have challenges. I want to do the best I can to provide as great an opportunity for anyone who comes to Long Beach City College to succeed."

No matter how much effort Oakley invests to create a predictable schedule, each day is different, but with one common thread — an unwavering commitment to giving students the resources and road map they need to succeed.

"The most important part of my day is the balance between working to create opportunities for our students to succeed and making LBCC the best place to work for our employees," says Oakley.

Whether he is at home in Long Beach or in Washington D.C. and Sacramento representing the interests of the college, Oakley says students are part of his "daily dialogue".

"Advocating for LBCC in Sacramento and Washington D.C. takes a lot of my time because of the severe cuts that are being negotiated for the community college system," says Oakley. "My passion is to ensure that public education not only survives in California, but thrives."

Oakley is also a key player in the coalition for what he calls the "the Long Beach College promise". It's a partnership between CSULB, the Long Beach Unified School District and LBCC to make it as easy as

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– Eloy Ortiz Oakley

possible for someone who wants to get from kindergarten to their master's degree without leaving the city.

Always conscious of budget constraints, Oakley uses his MBA and experience overseeing the finances and operations of LBCC to ensure that the voters who approve bond measures that will benefit the college get the best value for the money.

The California community college system educates 2.8 million students at 110 colleges throughout the state, making it the largest education system in the world.

These students are the backbone of the workforce in California because they can earn associate's degrees and transfer to a four-year university or enroll in vocational training that will provide them with well-paying jobs within two years. Oakley is also the liaison between the college and the business community to ensure that there is a pipeline that connects graduates to employment.

"I spend a lot of time fighting and educating people on the importance of community colleges," says Oakley. "People have tended to take community colleges lightly because they don't realize the huge impact we have on the workforce and the economy of the state."

Oakley represents LBCC as a member of the boards of directors of St. Mary Medical Center, the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, YMCA of Greater Long Beach, Long Beach Rotary Club, Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, The CSULB Ed.D Program Educational Leadership Advisory Board and the American Association of Community College Commission on Diversity.

Oakley spends all of his off time with his family. He and Bernadette have four children and one grandchild. Their oldest daughter is a graduate of LBCC. Oakley is also an assistant scoutmaster for his son's Boy Scout troop.

"Being president of LBCC takes a toll on my family because of my schedule and the stresses that come with the job," says Oakley. "My family does a wonderful job of keeping me grounded. When I am at home, I am not president, I'm just Dad." ■

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