

## Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor visits Stockton

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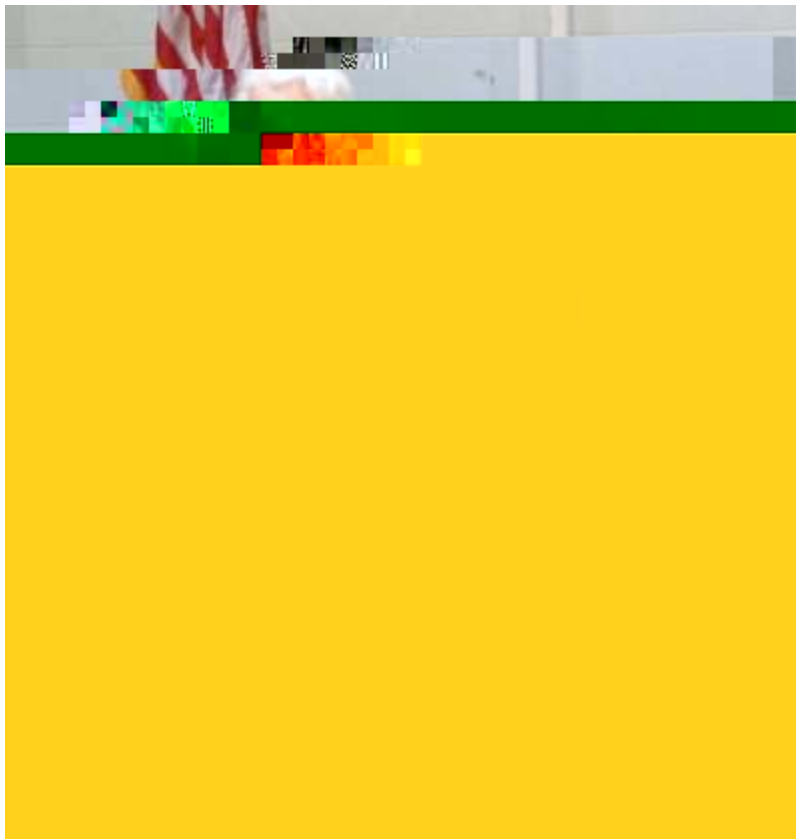
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### Talking women's opportunities and jurisprudence



GALLOWAY — Retired United States Justice Sandra Day O'Connor left nearly 3,000 gathered at the Big Blue Athletic Complex on the campus of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey wishing to hear just a little more. O'Connor spoke at the college as part of the Dean and Zoe Pappas Visiting Scholar Series.

Her speaking engagement was billed as a conversation with Sandra Day O'Connor and it was just that. Her conversation occurred across the table with moderator and Attorney Thomas Wilner of Shearson and Sterling based in Washington DC who

argued the case of Guantanamo Bay detainees before the Supreme Court and prevailed.

Ronald Reagan appointed O'Connor in 1981 and upon her unanimous Senate approval she became the first female Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. O'Connor retired in 2006. It is apparent when O'Connor speaks that she has never shied away from being the first.

She grew up on the Lazy B Ranch in Arizona and she shared her experience living on the large and remote cattle ranch and then attending school in Texas. In 1948 she headed off to

Stanford earning her degree in economics and eventually earning her law degree. But it was 1952 and despite graduating near the top of her class, there were no doors open for her. She could not get a law firm to even consider her though one offered her a position as a secretary. "They told me, we don't hire women," O'Connor said.

Her first job; working in the San Mateo County attorney's office without pay until she got her foot in the door and proved her value to the firm. O'Conner served as deputy county attorney there.

In 1969 O'Connor was appointed state senator in Arizona and won reelection twice. It was a Sunday afternoon when a call from then President Ronal Reagan would really change her life. "He was not doing well with women voters so Reagan decided that appointing a woman to the Supreme Court would help. 'Ron Reagan here; Hello Sandra is that you? I have to nominate a woman for the Supreme Court so I am going to nominate you tomorrow, is that okay?'

The retired Justice admitted that her appointment changed the perception of women in the legal field but added that it has been a slow road to get women into positions of authority in this country. "To look up at that bench and see three women sitting on it is very satisfying."

O'Connor talked about the balance of career and family. She is the mother of three and was married 57 years when her husband John O'Connor passed away in 2009. "There is no easy answer for women." Moderator Thomas Wilner asked if men should do more and the answer revealed O'Connor's dry and sharp wit when she said casually; "Well you probably should but it's not likely to happen." She countered that comment and told the young mothers listening, "hang in there because it is all worth it at the end of the day."

O'Connor shared stories of her quarter century on the Supreme Court; stories about meeting the Justices at the beginning of their session, about the amount of reading that each of the Supreme Court Justices do just to determine what cases will be heard and about the civility that exists among the members.

Since her retirement from the Supreme Court O'Connor has remained very active. She will still sit on selected federal circuit courts and she has found a passion in education as well. O'Connor spoke of the dearth of understanding of how government works. "We have this wonderful system of government and we used to teach it in school and now very few schools teach civics. We have established ICivics to prepare young Americans to be active and intelligent citizens." It is an Internet based free educational site. Stockton President Herman Saatkamp said the William Hughes Center is working with the ICivics program.

O'Connor's visit to Stockton as the first speaker in the Dean and Zoe Pappas visiting scholar series came about because of a speaker that inspired Dean Pappas, a member of

the Stockton Board of Trustees. "I was a junior at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA when Dr. Martin Luther King came to speak. I remember him speaking vividly. Dr. King said that he and his wife had visited the Holy Land and walked down the road the Good Samaritan had traveled and that he took his life in his hands by doing this and he said that is what we have to do. We have to take risks." So Pappas headed back home to help his family and their business, Clement Pappas and Co. in Vineland. Zoe Pappas is a former government teacher at Vineland High School.

Dean Pappas said that while the college is always in need of scholarships, he wanted to do something that could allow someone to be inspired by a great speaker as he was. "For me it was a life-changing experience to hear Dr. King speak. I would like someone else to have that chance."

While the Pappases have no input on the speaker, they trust the college will bring someone of character to speak to the students.

Stockton President Herman Saatkamp said they have not determined who the next person to speak will be and will try to invite someone every other year in order for the endowment to grow. O'Connor did not charge any fee for her visit which aside from the conversation in the athletic complex also took her into two law classes earlier in the day where she fielded questions from students. It is yet to be determined if they will be making a donation to a charity of O'Connor's choice in her name.

At the close of the hour long conversation Saatkamp and Stockton Provost Harvey Kesselman presented O'Connor with an honorary degree. To conclude the program the crowd sang Happy Birthday to Justice O'Connor as she marks her 84th birthday March 26.

