Oct. 25, 2012

Professor Francie Dillon wins arts award

When Professor Francie Dillon was named Arts Educator of the Year by the Arts & Business Council of Sacramento during an Oct. 12 luncheon, she wasn't sure how to get her message across in her acceptance speech. So she borrowed lessons from the hokey pokey.

Dillon teaches Literature for Children and has been performing for years at venues such as Fairytale Town and the Sacramento Public Library, where her shows have been aimed at bringing literature to children.

She has a reputation for throwing herself into her shows, and some of her fans have been very enthusiastic about her performances. Following one show in front of young children, a 4-year-old came up to her and said, “When it’s time, I think I’ll hire you for my wedding.”

But Dillon has had to curtail many of her activities because of an undiagnosed neurological problem that has affected her mobility and speech. “I was concerned that if I did win, would my body allow me to say what I wanted to say, the way I wanted to say it.”

While approaching the stage, she was helped by Sacramento Business Journal columnist Ed Goldman and found her strength. “It was like the person who lectures and is the entertainer came out, and it all fell into place,” Dillon says.

Noting that her success has occurred through many components, Dillon quoted the hokey pokey to the audience. “When I put my right hand in, always at the other end has been my family and my friends who believed in me even when I didn’t believe in myself.”

Left hand, right leg and left leg represent Fairytale Town, the library, the Sacramento Bee, and fans young and old. “And when you shake yourself all about, that’s when you acknowledge what it is to be human – the creativity, curiosity and participation in life. That is what it’s all about.”

Dillon was one of three nominees. The others were Art Professor Elaine O’Brien – who also is a Sacramento State instructor – and Milton Bowens, lead artist in residence at the Twin Rivers Unified School District.
Dillon’s award was one of several given out Oct. 12. For more information, visit www.sacabc.org/programs/prelude-to-the-season/. For media assistance regarding Sacramento State’s arts programs, call the University’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

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